A Declaration of Those Things Which Are Most Surely Believed Among Us An Expositional Study of The Gospel According to Luke Chapter 20- Luke 20:19-26

305- The Relationship Between the Christian and Human Government- Part 2

March 06, 2016

Luke 20:19-26

19 The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them.

 20 So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they *could* deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor.

²¹ They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth.

22 "Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?"

23 But He detected their trickery and said to them,

24 "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's."

²⁵ And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

²⁶ And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent.

To the Glory of God

We are not home. This world is *not* our home. The United States of America, which I consider to be the greatest nation in the history of the world, is *not* our home. My house on Howison Drive is *not* my home. And the house that you live in is *not* your home. The Bible teaches that we are on a journey *through* this life to *another* life that *is* our home.

Now even though it is true that some of us may live upwards of over 100 years in this life- yet we will spend all of eternity in the next life. And that is *why* the Bible speaks of this life as being nothing but a vapor. For example, 600 years before Jesus was born- the Prophet Isaiah wrote this in **Isaiah 40:6b-8:**

6 ... All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field.
7 The grass withers, the flower fades, When the breath of the Lord blows upon it; Surely the people are grass.

8 The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.

And this tells us two things:

- 1. Compared to God- human beings are as glorious and as important as the bloom of grass
- 2. Compared to eternity- this life is very short and very fleeting

... and yet this life is very important, because what we do and what we believe and what we trust in and what we love and what we find joy in and how we live in this life determines what will happen in the next.

And that is why we are going through this life seeking a City, a City that has eternal Foundations that cannot be moved, a City Whose Architect and Builder is God. And the Holy Bible teaches that all truly saved people will live in that City, with a new body, forever.

And we will receive a new body that will hold our spirit throughout the endless eons of Eternity. And that body will be immortal, and that body will not be a male or a female body, but it will have new eyes and new ears that are capable of seeing and comprehending the inexpressible Majesty of God in all His fullness, without any filters. And we will enjoy what we see. And so over there we will enjoy the God that we know in part now, forever.

And because that is true, the Bible teaches us that we should live here in a particular way that is strange and odd. The Bible teaches us that we are to live down here as "strangers" and "aliens" and sojourners; as people who are merely "passing through this life. Which should allow us to understand that the normal, correct, and Biblical Christian existence is *always* lived *away* from our true home. And the lesson that we can learn from many in the modern Church is that, in *these* days, we have come to be too "at home" in this life and in this country.

And that is *why* we are told all through the Bible to not love the world and to not love money and to not trust in what our hands can build and to not set our affections on things of this earth that are passing away.

And yet, in addition to everything I just said, Jesus says here in the Passage that Brother Andy just read to us that we should:

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's

... and that Command from our Lord makes us pause and makes us have to think, and it makes us struggle so we can be obedient to two very different compositions:

- 1. Live on this earth as productive citizens of an earthly nation
- 2. Live in such a way that we are never fully a part of this world

So what exactly is the role of the State in human affairs? How is the State to relate to the Church of Jesus Christ? And how are Christian people supposed to relate to the Government's Authority? These are the questions that Jesus raises and that we began to explore last week with His very simple but very profound Statement in **Luke 20:25:**

Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.

So on the one hand, we saw last week that by making this Statement Jesus was establishing a very important spiritual Principle:

Everything belongs to God

... which, of course, means that Caesar *himself* belongs to God. And from that we can extrapolate another Principle. For example:

Government is of God

And from that we see two other things:

✓ Government is accountable to God

✓ We should respect and honor Government

So while it is true that the State or the Government or Caesar is *not* the same thing as the Church and is *distinct* and *separate* from the Church, nevertheless, Government is fully *accountable* to God, and therefore, must never operate in *opposition* to God or *oblivious* of God. So, for example, it is *not* true, as so many say, that the Government should be purely "secular", meaning totally devoid of any spiritual component. And that is *not* the goal of Government for two very important reasons:

A. It isn't possible

B. It doesn't work

It is neither possible nor workable for Government to be purely secular precisely because Government is made up of human beings who are guided and motivated and informed, not merely by facts, but also by what they believe. And *whatever* "morality" informs people is what will eventually guide and determine their actions.

But a purely secular Government doesn't work because all throughout history anytime a Government tried to achieve pure secularism it *always* descended into brutality and injustice, precisely because everyone who holds power over another human being is fallen. And this is why CS Lewis said:

"I am a democrat (a believer in Democracy) because I believe in the Fall of Man. I think most people are democrats for the opposite reason. A great deal of democratic enthusiasm descends from the ideas of people like Rousseau, who believed in democracy because they thought mankind so wise and good that everyone deserved a share in the government. The danger of defending democracy on those grounds is that they're not true. Whenever their weakness is exposed, the people who prefer tyranny make capital out of the exposure. I find that they're not true without looking further than myself. I don't deserve a share in governing a hen-roost, much less a nation...The real reason for democracy is just the reverse. Mankind is so fallen that no man can be trusted with unchecked power over his fellows. Aristotle said that some people were only fit to be slaves. I do not contradict him. But I reject slavery because I see no men fit to be masters."¹

And because it is true that Government is of God, the State *deserves* both respect and honor from us. So Jesus Himself was *not* an "anarchist". And Christianity does *not* promote individual autonomous "self-rule". Jesus taught that we are to respect and honor human Government, and Christianity teaches that we are to obey the Government. For example, the Apostle Paul taught in **Romans 13:1:**

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

So Government is of God, and therefore, no one merely assumes authority over another person. That authority is *given* by God. And if that was all that the Bible taught, then that would be that. But then we also saw last week another Divine Principle that we need to understand:

Government is not Absolute

And so, the fact that Jesus said in **Luke 20:25** that we need to "render to God the things that are God's" shows that human Government is not alone. It stands on top of a *greater* and more *important* Principle that says that *everything* belongs to God, *including* Government.

And so while it is true that all human government is of God, it is also true that all human Government gets its power and its authority from God. And that means that Government is *subservient* to God. It means that Government is under God and is accountable to God. And therefore, Government is *not* absolute, God is absolute.

Because Government is always made up of very fallible and flawed people, we must treat Government lightly and we must handle it carefully. So, on the one hand, we are to respect and honor human

¹ CS Lewis; The Spectator, vol. CLXXI (27 August 1943), p. 192

Government as an *extension* of God's Will on the earth. But, on the other hand, we are to also hold Government *accountable* to its God-given duty and responsibility. So we are to honor Government, but not totally, and we are to obey Government, but not blindly.

Now we began this discussion last week and we got into it to some depth, and today, I would like to take us even deeper into this discussion to see just what it looks like for 21st Century American Christians to:

Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.

And I would like to do that by engaging in the exercise of "Sola Scriptura" which means that we develop what we believe and what we teach "from the Scriptures" and "from the Scriptures alone" and not from any other source.

So I'm not interested in what the Founding Father's said about Government. I'm not using the logic of the Patriots of that day or the Tea Party of our day. I'm not going by the teachings of either the Republican or the Democratic Parties. I want to develop what we believe and teach about Government, and every other issue, by reading and analyzing and correctly interpreting the inspired and infallible and inerrant Words that came forth from the very Mind and Heart of the Owner and Creator of the Universe, which is the sacred Scriptures.

And so to understand what Jesus meant here in **Luke 20**, we need to let the Bible interpret the Bible, and read a very important Passage that deals with this subject from the greatest Letter ever written- Paul's Epistle to the Romans. So let's turn to **Romans 13** and read this together.

Romans 13:1-7

1 Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

² Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

³ For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but for evil. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same;

⁴ for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

⁵ Therefore it is necessary to be in subjection, not only because of wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for *rulers* are servants of God, devoting themselves to this very thing.

⁷ Render to all what is due them: tax to whom tax *is due;* custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor.

Now, right of the bat, the context here is that Paul's discussion of the legitimate authority and proper function of the State is a natural follow-up to the immediately preceding section in Chapter 12 where he presented the duty of the Christian to return "good for evil".

So from the beginning, we see that a Christian does not *always* have to be victimized by evil persons. It is the State's "God-given duty" to *restrain* and to *punish* the evil designs of fallen humans.

Now, a discussion about the role of the State is very natural in a letter to Christians who are living in the middle of a pagan Roman world. And historically, Jews were notoriously *resistant* to all outside authority. They had engaged in numerous rebellions throughout the centuries against the various pagans who had overrun their land.

But what many Jews were too often willfully ignorant of was the fact that the only reason why they were subjugated by unbelieving Gentiles in the first place was because they had refused to love and serve the God Who called them His people. And so God Himself raised up these various Empires that brutally and viciously crushed the Jew. And then when God's people repented, this same God judged the pagan nations and restored freedom and liberty to the Jews. But because most of the Jews who lived in Israel during the days of the OT were not saved, this process was repeated over and over again.

But the greatest and most destructive of all the Jewish revolts against human government was less than a decade away from the time that Paul wrote this Epistle. That rebellion would be crushed by the Roman general, Titus, in 70 A.D., from which the Jew would never recover.

But at the time that God the Holy Spirit moved upon the Apostle to write down these inspired Words, Christians were somewhat shielded

underneath a law that had been originally advanced by Julius Caesar. But terrible turmoil was coming. And persecution against believers and followers of Jesus Christ by the ruling authorities was coming that would last until the middle of the 4th Century.

So, were these "little christs", these Christians, supposed to align themselves with the coming Jewish revolution, or were they to be loyal citizens of the all-encompassing Roman empire? And if so, what about the Lordship of Jesus Christ? Was Jesus King, or was He not? And if they were *not* to be loyal citizens of Rome, then what exactly was the Christian position regarding Rome to be? And from that, what should be our position regarding the United States?

But notice that the Apostle does *not* begin the discussion about the relationship between the Christian and Government by talking about either Government or the Christian. Paul begins with God. And so Paul lays down the first and overarching Principle when Christians talk about any serious issue:

The Absolute Sovereignty of God

Romans 13:1

Every person is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God.

Now the word "for" here means "because". So the reason why believers should be in subjection to the governing authorities is not because the authorities themselves have any value or nobility in themselves, they don't. But we who love and serve Jesus should be in subjection to our Government "because" the Government is not the main thing. God is the main thing. And so Government is of God, and therefore, Government is not absolute, God is absolute.

And so believers are in subjection to God. And God has willed that there be human Government. And *that* is why we are to be in subjection to Government.

And so the starting point of Paul's argument is found in the reason he gives for his categorical opening statement that "everyone," not only Christians, but every person "**is to be in subjection to the governing authorities**". Why? The answer is not because you will get into trouble if you don't, or even that obedience is necessary for maintaining

social order. Those are excellent pragmatic reasons that Paul understands, and he's going to bring both of those into the discussion in the future, but they are *not* the main reasons he gives here at the beginning. What he says in verse 1 is that we must obey the authorities because of two reasons:

- 1. For [because] there is no authority except from God
- 2. and [because] those [governing authorities] which exist are established by God

In other words, the starting point for Paul's argument is the often neglected Doctrine of the Absolute Sovereignty of God. So as far as human rulers go, believers are to understand that God is sovereign. And so those who exercise authority over us do so only because God has sovereignly established them in that position and given them that authority.

Now this is a lot easier for us to swallow when we are given godly rulers, or when people of high moral character are elevated to positions of responsibility. But what are we to think about evil rulers? What about Nero, the corrupt and evil Emperor who was reigning in Rome at the very time Paul was writing this letter? Are we to believe that our Good and Glorious God gave Nero his power? And what about the rulers who brought about horrific persecution to the Church? Are we to think that God somehow *allowed* that? Or, for that matter, what about such evil leaders in recent history that wrecked such havoc on the world like Adolf Hitler, and Joseph Stalin, and Idi Amin, and Mao and Sadaam Hussein? And how are we to understand God's Sovereignty in regards to our own elected officials like Richard Nixon or Bill Clinton who betrayed our trust and disappointed us?

Romans 13:1 establishes the Divine Principle that "bad" Government, even "evil" Government, is better than no Government at all, and that whether "bad" or "good", all Government is of God. So the Holy Bible un-apologetically teaches that even these evil authorities have been established by God, and therefore, we have a legitimate responsibility to obey them, even though that responsibility is not *absolute*.

Now before you get angry with me, we need to understand that even though the subject was very different, Paul has already given us an example of an evil but nevertheless God-established ruler back in **Romans 9** with Pharaoh, the evil man who brutally and unmercifully oppressed God's people.

We need to remember that it was Pharaoh who worked the Jews as slaves, and arrogantly resisted Moses' demand that he let God's people go. And God judged his arrogance. Egypt was ruined by a series of Divine plagues that ended with the death of all the firstborn children of the entire country. And, to add insult to injury, the collective military might of the mightiest standing army in the world at that time was utterly annihilated by drowning in the Red Sea.

But as evil as this man was, Pharaoh had, nevertheless, been put into his position by God, which Paul clearly says in **Romans 9:17:**

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE <u>I RAISED</u> <u>YOU UP</u>, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH."

So the Bible teaches that only reason Pharaoh was in that position of power and authority was so that God might do two things:

- ✓ To judge him (*TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU*)
- ✓ So that the fame of God's Glory would be magnified throughout the whole world (*THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH.*)

Now this was certainly not a desirable appointment. But even at that, Paul *insists* here that it was God Who had sovereignly raised up Pharaoh precisely because God is Sovereign in all things.

Another example would be Nebuchadnezzar, who was another arrogant ruler. And for a time, this man even thought he was superior to God Himself because he had been allowed to conquer Jerusalem, desecrate and raze the Temple, and carry off to Babylon the gold and silver objects that had been used by the Jewish priests in their worship, and God did not stop him.

But what Nebuchadnezzar didn't understand was that God was actually using him to bring God's people to a place of Repentance and Salvation. Now the first four Chapters of **Daniel** are a chronological record of the struggle that took place as Nebuchadnezzar contended against God for Sovereignty. And it is there that we find that God broke this arrogant pagan and humbled him and gifted this wicked king with the Divine Revelation that God alone is the Most High and Ruler of all. God revealed that **"the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, And bestows it on whom He wishes"**, three different times in **Daniel 4.**

- > Nebuchadnezzar heard these words in his dream (Daniel 4:17)
- > Daniel gave them to him as the Word of the Lord (Daniel 4:25)
- Nebuchadnezzar heard them directly from Heaven when God uttered His Judgment of insanity upon him (Daniel 4:32)

So it seems that this is a fairly important Truth that God wanted this man to understand. And Nebuchadnezzar seems to have gotten the Message- because in **Daniel 4:34b&35**- he said:

Daniel 4:34b, 35&37b

34 ... I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; For His dominion is an everlasting dominion, And His kingdom *endures* from generation to generation.

³⁵ "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But He does according to His will in the host of heaven And *among* the inhabitants of earth; And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, 'What have You done?'

37 ...I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honor the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

... in other words- Nebuchadnezzar was sovereignly brought to a place of great humility- and to acknowledge that his own governmental authority was merely an extension of God's Will in the earth.

And yet another example would be Cyrus the Persian, who is also mentioned in Daniel (1:21; 6:28; 10:1). Now Cyrus was an unusually *humane* ruler whom God used to bring the Jews back to Jerusalem from Babylon. And in Isaiah 45:1 this pagan king is even called:

His [the Lord's] anointed

... which comes from the Hebrew word for "Messiah" – which is the same title given to Jesus as the Messiah of God. Now Cyrus was not *the* Anointed of God; he was not *the* Messiah- Who was sent to "deliver" God's people from their sins. Cyrus was a "mini-messiah" who was raised up and sent by God to "deliver" God's people from their physical bondage and captivity from Babylon.

But all three of these unsaved rulers, Pharaoh, Nebuchadnezzar, and Cyrus, were given to us in inspired Scripture so we could grasp the enormity of the Truth that God alone is absolutely Sovereign, and that *all* human rulers are raised up and set into their place by God. And we need to understand that they dole out both justice and injustice at either God's sovereign "*Causation*" or His "*Allowance*".

Now even though many people will balk at this today, the Church that was on the earth 500 years ago believed this and taught it. For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith that was written 370 years ago says:

"God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy Counsel of His Own Will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" (III, 1).

So the first Principle we need to get into our minds about the Christian's relationship to Government is:

There is no ruler anywhere or from any time in history who was not set in his exalted position by God.

But now comes the hard part. Because our problem is not just *believing* that God has established whatever rulers there may be. We are able on some abstract level to accept that. Because to give mental ascent to the fact that God is Sovereign is simple, as long as we can then have the option of either *approving* or *disapproving*, or even *rejecting* and *ignoring* them.

The hard part is that the Apostle didn't stop with the theological issue of God's Sovereignty. He then began to meddle in our lives and gave us Divine Truth- that it is the sacred duty of all genuine Christians to *obey* those who exercise such authority. That's the hard part. And then he went into even *greater* detail and told us that as sons and daughters of the Lord Christ- we are to *submit* to *all* the human

institutions, not just the big ones like kings and presidents, but also policemen, and judges, and schoolteachers, and bosses, and other such "governing authorities." Please read **Romans 13:2** again with me:

Therefore whoever resists authority has opposed the ordinance of God; and they who have opposed will receive condemnation upon themselves.

Now there is no doubt that the Apostle Paul is writing here about the civil government. But these other "authorities" come into the picture because they, too, have "governing roles", and they have, also, been set in place by God.

Now there are many obvious problems at this point because Paul does not answer a lot of our questions. For example:

- ✓ When is a Government a *legitimate* Government, and when isn't it?
- ✓ When is it right and correct to rebel against an unjust or tyrannical Government, or is rebellion permitted at all?
- What about our own American War of Independence? If we had been alive back then- what side should we have been on- with England or with the colonists?
- What are we to do when there are rival claimants to the throne? Which one should we obey?
- ✓ At what point does an unjust ruler become illegitimate?
- Or what about limits? Paul says we are to obey the governing authorities. But does this mean that we are to obey *everything* the Government commands?
- ✓ What about unjust acts commanded by an evil Government-like killing civilians or lying?
- ✓ What would believers do if commanded by the Government to persecute fellow believers?
- What about secret and clandestine operations like spying for the CIA?

Now what these questions entail is not the issue of God sovereignly instituting Government directly. These are questions of *degrees*. Is the command to obey the Government absolute? Or are there limits to our obedience?

As I told you last week, I believe the Scriptures give us not only infallible Words to go by, but also *actions* that were also inspired by God as well. So I personally believe that it is not merely the Words of the Biblical writers that need to be studied, but also what they did. And I realize that this can get dicey real fast. But that is why we have only a limited number of Biblical lives to follow. There is nothing within the context of Sola Scriptura that would prohibit that.

So while it is true that we can learn much from men who came before us but who lived after the Canon was completed, like Augustine and Luther and Edwards and Spurgeon, we should use great caution to *not* to raise the lives of *those* people up to the same height as we do those who are specifically mentioned in the Bible itself. But I think it is perfectly safe for us to not only be taught from the meaning of the infallible Words of Scripture, but also from how the people given in the Bible actually lived their lives.

Now, Lord willing, we will get into some of these exceptions to our obedience that are taught in Scripture next week. But the point I am making here is that the matter of obedience to those in authority *cannot* be taken lightly, as we who live in America often do.

I think there is much about the United States that is admirable, even enviable. But, there are some aspects to the American culture that hinder us from fully accepting and trusting in things like this because this 230 year old experiment with Democracy that we have here is so new and so unique. And one of some of the aspects that American Christians struggle with perhaps more than others are things like:

- The Absolute Sovereignty of God
- The Radical Ruination of Man
- The Sovereign Distribution of God's Mercy

... because, many times, these Biblical concepts clash with our understanding of "Human Free Will", "Fairness", and "American Liberty".

But we have to understand that the only reason *why* we struggle with these Biblical concepts is not because they are not true, because they are. The reason we struggle with these unpopular but inerrant Concepts is because we understand the American Ideal that wrongly declares that "all men are created equal" more than we do with the Biblical Truth that:

Psalms 115:3 But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.

So it is God's very Own radical "God-centeredness" that is so enormously offensive to so many in the modern Church. The notion that we are *not* the main focus of God in the Universe is simply more than many people can tolerate. For God to have the audacity to love Himself and to promote His Own Will and Glory *above* our plans is increasingly becoming unacceptable to the American Church. And *that* is the problem.

And the only way to fix this problem is by first repenting of developing a "Man-centered theology", and then by going back to the Scriptures and hearing God tell us just Who He is and who we are. And until we do that- we will *always* be skewed about things like this.

Now back in the fall of 1561- there was a very important conversation that took place in Scotland between Queen Mary and the Calvinistic Protestant preacher John Knox.

Now Mary was a devout Catholic. And she had earned the nickname "Bloody Mary" because she viewed any departure from the official catechism of Rome to be heresy. And so she put to death many of the Puritans and Reformers during her reign. Mary herself had been educated in Catholic France, and she believed that rulers, like herself, had absolute power over every aspect of the realm that God had given them, even the consciences of their subjects.

John Knox was one of the Reformers that God used to bring the Church back to her original roots. And because of his uncompromising preaching- Knox had been sentenced to serve as a galley slave for nineteen months. After his release, he had studied in Geneva under John Calvin from 1553 to 1559. Then, in the summer of 1560, he had participated in the drafting of the Scottish Confession of Faith that stated that:

"Jesus Christ is the only Head of His Kirk [Church]"²

² The Scottish Confession of Faith; Sections 11 and 18

And in their confrontation, Queen Mary accused Knox of having wrongly taught the people to receive a "different religion" than the Catholic Cardinals, and that she herself allowed. She said:

"And how can that doctrine [taught in **Romans 13**] be of God, seeing that God commands subjects to obey their princes?"

And Knox answered,

"Madam, as right religion took neither [its] origin nor authority from worldly princes, but from the Eternal God alone, so are not subjects bound to frame their religion according to the appetites of their princes."

Knox went on to admonish Mary and said,

"God commands queens to be nurses unto His people."

Mary replied,

"Yes, but you are not the church that I will nourish,"

Knox replied,

"Your will, Madam, is no reason [authority]."³

You see, John Knox understand that Queen Mary was not absolute, but that God was absolute. Which was something that the Queen wasn't too fond to hear. And so there was great tension between Church and State, and between the Christian and his Government back in the sixteenth century. And there was no relief in Scotland until Mary's forced abdication in 1567.

So, Lord, willing, we will look into the exceptions that Scripture gives to our obedience to Government, next week.

Amen. Let's pray

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