

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKER

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SERIES

Grace Unleashed:
The Book of Ephesians

PART

20

TITLE

Distinguished By Our Love

SCRIPTURE

Ephesians 4:30-5:2



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Well, good morning, Providence. It's a joy to be with you guys this morning and to open God's word up again. He's grace to us. He's given us breath and another day to live in the world that he made and live in light of what he's done. If you're joining us for the first time, my name is Brian. I'm one of the pastors on staff here. If you are a guest with us, then it is our joy to welcome you in this place. We love the word of God here. We're in month number six of a series on the book of Ephesians. If you want to, you can turn over to Ephesians chapter four. We're going to finish up chapter four today and roll into chapter five. We'll be moving toward the end of the book in the weeks ahead.

If you're visiting with us and you don't have a Bible, if you look under the chair in front of you, there ought to be one to your right or left or directly in front of you. You're welcome to use that today. If you don't have one at home, we would love for that just to be our gift to you. We believe that God, in his kindness to us, he gave us his word so we might know him and it would be our joy to pass that along to you. If that is the Bible you're using, you can find Ephesians four, the scripture that we're going to look at on page 978 of that Bible. You don't have to guess where it is in the Bible. It is the New Testament toward the back end of the Bible. It's 978.

Before we get into the text, I'd like to play a little short game with you guys this morning. Here's how this is going to go down. Everybody's laughing. They're a little scared. I'm going to say a word and I'm going to give you a second to form an image in your mind of the word that I say. Here's the word. Everybody ready? On the edge of your seats. Cowboy. All right. Cowboy. Everybody got an image in their head? Is this the image that was in your head? Or maybe this. Now, it all depends on perspective. I'm not endorsing one or the other. I will say that I think one is a better picture of a cowboy. I'll leave it at that. Following along with that, what about a metal band? What comes to mind? No more pictures, I promise. What about a metal band or what about a rapper comes to mind when you think about rappers? How about surfers or what about policemen?

Chances are that every type of person that I call out, it evokes an image in your mind before you ever see anything on a screen. You also likely have an opinion about what that person or that group of people are like, how they talk, what they wear, how they act, and maybe even the color of their skin based on your perception of these things. What about a Christian? What image comes to mind when I say Christian? Now, I think it's fitting that we're here in this place in Ephesians on the hills of the death of Billy Graham, remarkable man of God, 99 years old, passed away this week. I want to read what someone wrote. Russell Moore who's the President of the Ethics and Religious Liberties Committee of the Southern Baptist Convention, penned an article for The Washington Post this week in light of the death of Billy Graham. I really think that Dr. Moore's words capture the heartbeat of why I would even think as we think of a Christian as a picture of someone like Billy Graham, what we have in mind.

Here's what Moore said, "Graham, who died on Wednesday at the age of 99, was perhaps the most significant Christian evangelist since the apostle Paul." Think about that, the most significant Christian evangelist since the apostle Paul. "This wasn't because of his media savvy or his political influence. He transcended all of that with an obvious belief in the gospel that he preached, obvious even to those watching on television or sitting in a stadium's nosebleed seats, which is where I saw Billy Graham as a teenager. Graham did not think that the brave new world needed anything other than an old time gospel. As we grieve the loss of Billy Graham, let's thank God that, in this man's life, we were able to see the gospel that is, still, and forever more the power of God unto salvation." Remarkable picture of a life spent for the sake of the gospel.

At the beginning of the letter to Ephesians, as we started this series back in September, Pastor Frost told us in that first sermon that our identity shapes our activity and that it would set the course for how we look at this book. Our identity shapes our activity. That's where we are today in chapter four of this book from Paul to the church at Ephesus. Paul spent the first half of his letter, chapters one through three, reminding the Ephesians of what God did to change their identity. God, through the power of the gospel and the work of Jesus Christ, changed their identity when they came to faith and believed in him and then he spends the last three chapters of his letter tooling down, really, and we've slowed the book down. Over the last several weeks, we did one verse at a time. We're actually going to do five this morning so we get a little bit more of this scripture. He tools down and he tells them in the last three chapters what this identity looks like. This is why you have a new identity and this is what your new identity looks like. In fact, to steal some of Paul's language from just a few verses back from where we are this morning, he really tells us what kind of clothes we ought to wear as we take on our new identity.

We're going to look at Ephesians chapter four verse 30 and we're going to read down through chapter five verse two. This is what the word of God says written through the hands of the apostle Paul, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God." Let's pray for a minute. Father, would you, in the next few minutes, let us just let the words of this letter in these five short verses wash over us and shape how we understand our identity? May we live light of what you say is true about us because of what Jesus did for us. We pray these things in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, amen.

I want to give you a real quick roadmap of what this morning is going to look like. I'm going to give you three points or three things that I believe God tells us about our new identity, who we are because of what God has done. Then, at the end of that, I want to give three short applications hopefully to encourage you to act out what Paul has written about in these five verses, but before I get there, I actually want to do a little bit of background groundwork to help refresh your memory about the city of Ephesus and the people who lived there. It's been a while since we started this series. We went through a little bit of a history of Ephesus back at the beginning of the series in September, but there's a lot of water under that bridge. We're going to revisit that for a minute and help get you caught up because I think it has everything to do with us understanding who Paul's recipients were of this letter, the Ephesians, who they were and why this is important and how that impacts us.

Ephesus was actually a cultural hot seat. It was an influential town that happened to be the capital at the time of Asia. It was positioned on a major trade route with a well-protected harbor. Historians believe at the time of Paul when he lived, Paul lived in Ephesus for we think about three years. The book of Acts gives us a little bit of that history and chapter 19 tells us about how Paul got to Ephesus and what happened while he was there. We believe Paul lived there between two and three years. Then, on the heels of that, after leaving later down the road, he wrote the book of Ephesians to the church, the people that were left in Ephesus that were believing. Historians believe that, at that time, Ephesus had over 2,000 people in the city that were residents, which would have made it the third or fourth largest city in the Roman Empire at the time. It's pretty remarkable. A very influential city but also a spiritually dark place.

The temple of the goddess Artemis was there. There's a picture up that shows a replication of what they believe based on verbal description of the temple what the temple looked like. Now, just to give you a sense of the greatness of this temple to the mother goddess they called her, it was one of, at the time, it was one of the seven ancient wonders of the world. This thing was built ... We've got construction going on right out back here. This thing was built without lifts, no lifts and no heavy equipment and no laser levels. It was a remarkable, remarkable structure. It was made for the worship of a goddess that was one of many that they worshiped. It happened to be kind of the keeper city of worship for Artemis. What that meant for Ephesus was the people traveled from all over Asia and from all over the known world to worship on an annual basis at this temple.

This temple also, what history tells us is the temple was also a safe harbor for criminals. In other words, if they made it to the temple, then they were protected from the law. If they had done some heinous crime in the Roman Empire and they made it, this was one of the places where if they made it to Ephesus and they actually got on the physical property of the temple, then they were shielded from the law as long as they remained there. It became a place where criminals gathered along with the whole known world who came to worship this goddess of the Roman, it was actually a Greek goddess.

Paul steps into this city in Acts 19 and he actually, first, when he steps into Ephesus for the first time, he runs into some disciplines of John the Baptist, some Jews that knew John and knew John's teaching, but somehow, in the mix of all that had transpired, they'd never heard about Jesus.

They knew that John had come to preach about the coming of God and to call people to repentance, but they never heard of Jesus. Paul comes into contact with these people and he asks them, "Have you been baptized?" They're like, "We don't even know. By John's baptism. What do you mean baptized by the Spirit?" Paul shares Jesus with them. In joy, they believe. That starts the church at Ephesus. The church, over the two plus years that Paul spent there, the church grew to the point that it was reaching the Ephesians. Paul, we know even from the book of Ephesians, Paul was spending a ton of time actually investing in non-Jews who he said the gospel had come even to those who weren't a part of the descendants of Abraham. People in Ephesus who had grown up worshiping Artemis had come to faith.

In fact, Acts 19 tells us that there was such an uproar over some things that happened, there was a guy named Sceva and he had seven sons. He was a priest and he was trying to use Jesus's name to evoke demons from someone because he'd heard Paul and the power that was in Paul's preaching in the name of Jesus. He had seven sons and they tried to exercise a demon from this guy and the guy beat them up and sent them out into the streets without clothes on. Scripture tells us the city was in an uproar over it and they came to faith in Jesus because of it because they saw the power of God. There were these people coming to faith. Toward the end of Acts 19, what we're told is that people confessed prior idol worship. Now, remember, this city has the largest temple in the empire dedicated to the goddess Artemis, but it's not the only temple in the city. There were other temples built in the city that were there for emperor worship. They had temples built to propel the people to worship the Roman emperor as well. They were a spiritual dark place. These people were confessing idol worshiping, renouncing sinful practices, and they were burning books of magic.

They created such an uproar that there was a silversmith that lived in Ephesus and he made his living by carving images primarily for the worship of Artemis and his business was tanking because of the gospel. He gets other tradesmen who are in the same position and they create an uproar in the city, so much so that they grab a couple of the guys who have traveled with Paul on his missionary journey and are living there with them. They dragged these men into this next picture. It's fuzzy and I apologize. This is actually the theater in Ephesus, this massive outdoor theater. This is where the men dragged Paul's companions down before him. The whole city was in an uproar. It says so much that for two hours they shouted, just a roar of a crowd in the city shouting to Artemis because they were concerned that Paul was causing people to turn their back on Artemis and to worship this foreign God in Jesus. Paul had to leave the city. At that point, Paul leaves Ephesus. It's not safe anymore for him to be there, but the people who confessed Jesus stayed. Down the road, Paul writes this letter.

Now, why is this important? Because this text today is talking to those people who were left behind and those who had come to faith in Christ after Paul left because of the testimony of those who were residents of the city. These people were the ones that Paul wrote this book to and said these things, these people who had been in a seat of culture and industry in a dark spiritual place who had been rescued and their identity had been changed. To understand who the recipients of the letter was and how that fits with us, that kind of gets us to that place. Why does this matter? Because what Paul says helps us to understand what God is saying about our identity as well. This is what I believe we can extract from the text.

Point number one, God cautions us through Paul's writing, God cautions us not to be rebellious children. God cautions us not to be rebellious children. The language that Paul uses in this text is this, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit." Now, I'm going to get to why I think that that's Paul's admonition and God's admonition through Paul, all of us to not be rebellious children, but you all know them, rebellious children, children of famous people whose escapades litter the tabloids of every grocery store aisle in the country. They cause heartache and headaches for their parents and, often times, tens of thousands of dollars or more to fix problems that they've created, all because of their rebellion. Their troubles are often followed by heartless apologies or, even more likely, some simple statement from someone's attorney, but all of that is replicated just weeks or months or years later in a similar pattern all because they've really not changed. Maybe you're one of those children. Maybe your life stands in stark opposition to everything that your parents believe or ever taught you. You understand what it's like to be a rebellious child or you've had one.

Paul cautions us not to be rebellious children. Why? Because rebellious children grieve their parents. Rebellious children grieve their parents. In Proverbs 17:25, this is what the writer of the Proverbs says, "A foolish son is grief to his father and bitterness to her who bore him." Now, notice that I did not say that they embarrass their parents. Now, that may well be true. Rebellious children may embarrass their parents, but that's not the primary damage done by rebellion. If you're a parent, you know this. In fact, I would say that for parents who truly love their children, they aren't embarrassed by their children when they rebel. They're heartbroken for them.

Paul says here in Ephesians, "Don't grieve the Holy Spirit, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Now, why does Paul talk about it in terms of the Holy Spirit? Well, what has Paul told the Ephesians about the Holy Spirit just in what he's written in this book? I think there's three things that Paul says about the Spirit for us to understand the Spirit's role and his work in the hearts of those who confess belief in Jesus based on what Paul has written in the preceding chapters. The first is this. The Spirit is proof of our salvation. It's our guarantee that God has changed our identity. Ephesians one verses 13 and 14, as Paul's writing, he starts his letter. He says, "In him," in Jesus, "you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and you believed in him, you were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

It's the promise that he actually has changed us. He sends his presence with us. That's what Paul says. Just a few verses later, Paul also says the Spirit gives us insight. He goes on to write just a little bit further down in Ephesians one in 17 through 19, "That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you" it's his prayer, "that God may give you a Spirit of wisdom, of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which you've been called, which are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and what's the immeasurable greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his great might."

All that to say Paul is saying the Spirit helps us to understand who God is and what he's done. If you sit in this room and you've professed Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, the reason that you can open this book and understand it is the presence of the Spirit, not just understand the words that are written, but understand it in your heart and know that it's true. The Spirit is the one that causes that. Paul says the Spirit not only is the proof of our salvation, it tells us, no, you really have been changed, but it also is the one that gives us insight into what has been done for us. Then, just a little bit further in chapter three, Paul tells us the Spirit gives us power. Ephesians 3:16, "According to the riches of his glory that he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being." The Spirit is the power by which we not only can believe what God has said is true about us, but also do what God has called us to. Paul gets here and he says don't grieve the Spirit, don't be rebellious children who grieve the Spirit.

What grieves the Spirit? Well, in this passage, the verses right after that tell us, "Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice." How do you grieve the Holy Spirit? Well, it comes out of what was said right before it. "Let no unwholesome talk come out of your mouth, but only that which is good for building up, as fits the occasion to give grace. And don't grieve the Holy Spirit." That's what's written. Watch your mouth and what you say. Speak only words that build up and give grace. Grace is the gospel. Paul says if you don't do that, then you grieve the Spirit. What else grieves the Spirit? Well, bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander, along with all malice. It's all of these things. Don't lie. Don't steal. Don't be angry or, "Be angry and not sin," is what he says in the preceding versus. Don't be greedy, but earn money in order to give.

When we live by all of the things that Paul has told us that we should put off, in verse 22, Paul says, "Put off the old self." When we live by those things, all of that list of stuff that's wrong, the old nature, the greedy, self-sufficient, indulgent, lying, filthy talk, vengeful spirits, when you got that grudge that you never let someone live down because of what they've done to you, when we do all of those things, we don't just break the law of God, and that's bad enough that we would break the laws of God when we do those things, but laws are impersonal. What Paul tells us here is that when we live that way, we actually break the heart of God. Let that sink in on you.

If you're a child of God, that your rebellion against the things that are contrary to God's character in some miraculous way breaks his heart just like a rebellious child will break the heart of their parents. We see this in Isaiah 63. This is actually where Paul got this idea, but it also is reflected in Genesis chapter six right before the flood, right before Noah or right at the time of Noah. What Genesis six tells us is the Lord God saw the wickedness of man, that it was great in the earth and that every intention of the thought of his heart was only evil continually. The Lord regretted that he made man and it grieved him to his heart. It was grief to his heart. Rebellious children grieve the heart of their parents.

Now, how is the grief of the Spirit, the breaking of God's heart? Well, it's only true because of our identity. Track with me for a second. Why is it ... Most of us, if you're a parent here or even if you don't have kids, this still applies to you. When you see someone else's kid doing something wrong or dangerous or foolish, you might be bothered by it. You might be inconvenienced by it. You might even be sympathetic towards their parents because you've been there, but you likely don't grieve over it. Now why? Why? Because it's not your kid. Rebellion only grieves the heart of the parent. Why is this important here? Because if we grieve the Holy Spirit, it's because we're God's children. Your identity causes the outcome of your rebellion to break the heart of your Father.

John Owens, a Puritan pastor and writer, said this about grieving the Holy Spirit, "We grieve him when we're not influenced by his love and kindness. So as to yield holy obedience, enjoy love and delight to him. When we lose and forget the impression of the great mercies that we've receive from him or when we fall into those sins, which especially grieve him." In other words, Owen says we grieve God when we don't recognize or remember the depth of the love that God has for his children and we live contrary to it. The reason that we can grieve the Holy Spirit is because our identity has been changed and we're no longer enemies of God but we're children of God. Paul says don't grieve the Holy Spirit. When we grieve the Holy Spirit, we ignore his love and we act contrary to his nature and we live in those moments like we're not his children.

What else does Paul tell us in this passage? Well, not only does God caution us through Paul not to grieve the Spirit, not to be rebellious children, but he also calls us to act like his children. He says don't be rebellious children but act like his children. God calls us to act like his children, emphasis on his. He says it this way in the passage in five verse one, "Therefore be imitators of God," and my favorite part in this whole passage, "as beloved children." Why does Paul call us to imitate God? Because we're God's children. Our identity shapes our actions. We can grieve the Spirit because we're his children. We ought to act in accord with his character because we're his loved children.

What are some of the ways in the letter to the Ephesians that Paul calls us to imitate God? If we just look at chapter four in the verses that we walked, I'm going to skip a rock across some of these things. One, he says walk worthy of your calling. In other words, God, all the things that I said in the first half of my letter, the grace of God, that we were saved by grace through faith and that it wasn't a work of our own and that God has saved us, pulled us out of death, he says walk worthy of that, worthy of what's been done for you. In verse two, he says, "Bear with one another." Be patient with one another. In verse three, he says, "Maintain unity." Uphold the unity of the family. "Speak the truth in love," verse 16. "Put on the new self," the new identity in verse 23. "Speak the truth," don't lie, but speak the truth in verse 25. "Be angry and don't sin," in 26. Other words, Brian told us several weeks ago there is an anger that is righteous that God calls us to emulate, but he says don't be sinful in our anger. "Work in order to give," he tells us in 28. "Use words to build up and give grace," in verse 29.

Then, here in this passage, in verse 32, specifically Paul says this, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." How do we imitate God? By doing all of those things and a plethora of other things that are consistent with God's character. Now, you might be sitting here going, "You know what? That's great. I can't do it. Let's just take forgiveness for example. You don't understand what he or she did to me. My whole world was wrecked and turned upside down. I could never forgive. There's no way I can follow all these expectations. I am doomed for failure." If that's you, guess what, you're not alone and you're right. That's the story of the scripture.

Left to ourselves to do all of these things, we fail miserably. It's why the law is not sufficient to save us, because we can't perfectly perform it. We can't do it. We can try and we might even do okay for a while, but eventually we stumble because we're resting in our strength to do something that is impossible for us to do. The whole of the scripture is teaching us this, to lead us to this one remarkable truth. We need something or someone to come alongside us to help us in real time, game day decisions, to do what is impossible for us to do on our own. If you are feeling overwhelmed in doing all the things that God calls you to in imitation of him, you are likely not alone because the Ephesians probably felt that way too. If we're all honest, sitting to your right and left, we feel that weight as well.

How do we come out from under it? Well, I believe it's where Paul lands ultimately in these few verses. I believe that God compels us by his love. How are we able to shoulder the burden of imitating God? Well, it's because of what he's done for us and he's because he loved us first. What he says is, "Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God." Now, what is Paul saying here? God calls us to love like he loved but not before he simply calls us to receive his love. You guys get that? 1 John, the apostle John wrote in 1 John, "This is love, not that we've loved God, but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." What John is saying and what Paul is saying is, look, we can't follow the law perfectly.

We desperately need a savior who changes our identity and does what we can't do for ourselves. Then when we understand that that's exactly what God did for us, that he sent Jesus to do that, that our hope of pleasing God rests on the shoulders of the one who lived perfectly, who climbed up on a Roman cross and gave his own life on our behalf, that's where our righteousness comes from. It's the only way that we can actually be imitators of God. God, in his grace, made it possible through Jesus. When that truth comes over you, it ought to overwhelm you with amazement and gratitude. That love ought to compel you not to live out all of the things that Paul tells us to do Ephesians four and everywhere else in the scriptures, but what it ought to compel you to do is live in that love and be amazed.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians the love of Christ controls us or compels us because we've concluded this: That one died for all, therefore all of have died. In other words, Jesus's sacrifice was sufficient for my forgiveness. That compels me, that he died for all and that those who live will no longer live for themselves but for the sake of the one who died and was raised. Our hope rests in a risen savior who loved us so much that when we were dead in our trespasses, as Paul said in the beginning of Ephesians, he made us alive through his work on the cross. That truth should compel us. That's why Paul says walk in love. Let the truth of the gospel that saved you and changed your identity be the power in which you can live in light of it. Paul calls us to that.

What do we do in response to these words? As we land this morning, let me give you three simple things as we close. First of all, let's welcome the Spirit's presence and respond to his leading. Let's welcome the Spirit's presence. The Spirit's presence is proof of God's kindness to us. It's the seal of our salvation. If you are in this room and you've professed Jesus as your Lord and Savior, the presence of the Spirit is God's seal on you that he has changed your identity from enemy to friend, from dead to alive. It's amazing. If you're in this room though, and here's the reality, all of this is written to people who profess belief in Jesus. If you're in this room and you don't know Jesus but you hear these words and you feel the weight of what Paul says because of the truthfulness of what is promised, if you simply believe then, guess what, that also is the presence of the Spirit in your life convicting you of living an old identity and beckoning you to come to the one who can change it.

The application is true for believer or non. Welcome the Spirit's presence and respond to his leading. In Titus, Paul writes, "When the goodness and the loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us not because of works done by us in righteousness, because we couldn't do enough, but according to his own mercy, by the washing and the regeneration and the renewal of the Holy Spirit whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior." Amazing that God did all this work. Let's welcome the Spirit's presence and respond to his leading. Secondly, let's be intentional about imitating Christ in our actions and our attitudes. Fundamentally, what does that look like for us?

Well, it could be as simple as what Jesus says in the gospel of John, “A new commandment I give you: that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this radical, selfless, self-sacrificing love, all people will know that you’re my disciples.” That’s why Jesus says the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart and soul and mind and strength and the second, liken to the first, to love your neighbor as yourself. Then he puts his caveat on those laws. If we simply do those two, we don’t have to worry about all the other law because we’ll follow it. If we simply live under the love God has had for us, respond in kind, and love others that way, we will imitate Christ. Let’s do that.

Finally, as we’ve done for the last several weeks, let’s fix our eyes on Jesus and follow his example of love. Hebrews 12, “Let us lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, fix our eyes on Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who, for the joy that was set before him, the joy that was set before him endured the cross.” He went to the cross with joy, why? Because he knew that he would purchase our change of identity. With joy he did it because it pleased the Father. He went and he scorned the shame of the cross. He looked sin in the face and he said, “You do not win.” He’s now seated at the right hand of the Father. That’s what Jesus has done for us. That is how he changes our identity and how he equips us to be able to live light of it.

Today, may we live in the identity that has been granted to us because of the kindness of a Savior who would die for us. Let’s pray. Father, would you in your grace help us to believe this is true? If we do not know you, may this prompt us to be amazed at the love that you have for us, that you would do this. It’s free. You offer it to us freely. You promise a change of identity, a taking off of the old and a putting on of the new, that we might live in light of your love for us and that we might be a light to others who desperately need to hear that message. As we turn our hearts toward you now in worship, may we do so with amazement at what you’ve done. Let us live in light of the prompting of the Spirit, that we might honor you and we might be an example to others. We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.



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