**Colossians 3**

Colossians 1:21-23

8/10/25 AM

Today, we’re going to spend our time chewing on Colossians 1:21-23. Last week, we covered these verses in passing, but we left some doctrinal meat on these bones. So, today we’re going to circle back and tease out these verses a little further.

**And before we jump in, I want to share one of the neatest things that’s ever happened to me and that was hearing a stranger share my testimony.**

* I’ll never forget the look on his face. That moment was a great reminder for me of what God had done in my life.

PAUSE

The early Christians loved to tell of the great change brought about for them by the gospel. *“This is who I used to be, but by the grace of God, this is who I am now in Christ.”*

* They loved to tell of the transformation that God had brought about.
* But in this letter, it’s not the Colossians who are testifying, Paul is repeating their testimony back to them.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* He reminds these Colossian Christians of the great things Christ had done for them.

***Colossians 1:21-23 ESV*** *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* ***22****he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,* ***23****if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.*

If you remember the situation in Colossae, the false teachers weren’t encouraging anyone to forget about Jesus altogether; rather, they encouraged people to think of Jesus as a steppingstone.

* They said that committing your life to Christ is important, but they insisted that the real discoveries of life and fulfillment were found outside of Christ.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* To which Paul says, *“Let me remind you of the monumental change in your lives since coming to Christ. Let me share your testimony.”*
  + This is who you used to be (estranged from God/antagonistic), this is where you now stand (Christ has reconciled you/made peace), and this is where he is taking you (Remember what God has reserved for you in heaven. Remember that one day Christ will return, and he will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.)
* **They don’t need to look elsewhere! Everything they need is found in Christ. All that God has to offer, is found in Christ.**

Paul shares their testimony and reminds them of the wonderful promise of God.

**But this promise, like most, has a condition. The hope holds good, *if* Christians hold on to it.[[3]](#footnote-3)**

* The Greek word translated as “you must”, “provided that”, “if indeed”, or simply “if” indicates conditions that are expected to be fulfilled.[[4]](#footnote-4)
* And the verb ‘continue’ (*epimenein*) means to remain in a place or locality.[[5]](#footnote-5)
  + To “remain in their commitment Christ” would express the thought better, for Paul’s concern was with a commitment to Jesus as Lord (cf. Rom 10:9–10).[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Church, in verse 23 we have a very real warning.**

This warning, along with many others, presents the “human responsibility” aspect in the biblical portrayal of final salvation. God does, indeed, by his grace and through his Spirit, work to preserve his people so that they will be vindicated in the judgment; but, at the same time, God’s people are responsible to persevere in their faith if they expect to see that vindication.[[7]](#footnote-7)

* **Paul wants the Colossians and us to recognize that only by continuing in our faith can we hope to find a favorable verdict from God on the day of judgment.**[[8]](#footnote-8)

PAUSE

Church, one of the reasons I wanted to return to this passage today is because of some conversations I’ve had over the past year around this topic. And as we chew on this text today, my goal is to bring clarity to one of the settled doctrines of the COG movement and that is the doctrine of conditional security.

In the Church of God, like any church in the Wesleyan holiness tradition, we believe in and teach the assurance of salvation. We believe in real, soul-comforting security in Jesus Christ. We believe this because the Bible teaches it in (John 10:28-29; Rom 8.38-39; Phil 1.6; Jude 1.24-25).

**However, what we do not believe in is unconditional security.**

Unconditional security is the belief that once we become saved, we cannot ultimately or completely fall away from Christ. Proponents of this view maintain that we could become an adulterer, a murderer, or even an atheist. Yet, it will not affect our salvation because “once we’re saved, we’re always saved.”

* **Now, there are varying levels of this belief but as you can see this view can easily be abused.[[9]](#footnote-9)**
* And I think the idea would seem strange to Paul, for he, here as elsewhere (e.g., Rom 8:13; 11:22; 1 Cor 9:27; 10:11–12; Gal 5:4), insists that continuing in one’s commitment to Jesus is essential if one is to have a real eschatological hope.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**In the COG, we believe and teach in conditional security.**

Conditional security is the belief that while we as Christians have security of our salvation in Christ, we must persist in faith.[[11]](#footnote-11)

**While Scripture declares that salvation is eternally secure from God’s side, it stresses that it is conditional from the human side.** As believers, we don’t have to worry about whether God is doing his part in saving us, but we do need to be concerned with our response to the Lord.

* God’s part is to love believers, pay the price for their sin, and continually work not only to keep them from falling but also to help them grow in their faith. This much is eternally secure.
* The part of believers is simply to yield to God’s love and God’s Spirit working in their lives and this is a choice we make.
* God wants everyone to be saved, but he is not willing to override our freedom (2 Pet. 3:9). He wants a personal relationship with humans, and personal relationships involve choice. We must respond to God’s grace by consistently choosing to trust in Christ and thus walk with God.[[12]](#footnote-12)

But our belief in conditional security is not just an inference based on the nature of interpersonal relationships, we believe it’s explicitly taught in Scripture and when we take all the Biblical material together, we find at least a few reasons for this belief...

* The Bible describes salvation in conditional terms. It speaks of the possibility of apostasy.
* It repeatedly warns us about falling away.
* And it seems to identify certain individuals who did fall away.

These are the three Biblical arguments I want us to explore further today. (Acknowledge sources). For starters…

1. **The Bible describes salvation in conditional terms.**

**It speaks as if apostasy can and does happen.**

For example, in the OT, the Lord frequently "tests" his covenant partners "to know" whether they will remain faithful to him. For example, in Deuteronomy, as Moses prepares the people to enter the promised land…

***Deuteronomy 13:1-3 NLT*** *“Suppose there are prophets among you or those who dream dreams about the future, and they promise you signs or miracles,****2****and the predicted signs or miracles occur. If they then say, ‘Come, let us worship other gods’—gods you have not known before—****3****do not listen to them. The Lord your God is testing you to see if you truly love him with all your heart and soul.*

Israel had entered into a unique covenant relationship with the Lord. If they rejected God, they would be breaking the promise they had made.

And if they did not pass God's tests, they were no longer considered covenant partners with him (e.g., Ps. 95:10-11; Heb. 3:7-10; cf. Isa. 63:10; Acts 7:51; Eph. 4:30; Heb. 4:7).

* They could repent and return to the Lord, of course, but in their state of rebellion, they were "cut off" from God's covenantal promises (Rom. 11:17-24).
* Now, think about it, if God’s people were unconditionally secure (they could not fall away) why would God test them and how could he possibly cut them off.[[13]](#footnote-13)

**We see the same conditional nature of salvation taught in the NT as well.**

In the Parable of the Sower found in Mark 4:1-20, Jesus told how some received the gospel, but did not endure because of trouble, persecution, or worldly distractions (vv. 16-19).

* In his explanation, Jesus said that the soils represented different kinds of people and all soil originally received and accepted the gospel, but not all lasted. And according to Jesus, endurance was necessary for final salvation.
* ***Mark 13:13 NLT*** *…But the one who endures to the end will be saved.*

In 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul talks about finishing the race…

***1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT*** *Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!****25****All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.****26****So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.****27****I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*

**Paul said that he too could become disqualified, if he did not endure (v. 27).**

The Greek word translated as “disqualified” is *adokimos*, which means reprobate, rejected, disapproved, unfit, failing to stand the test.[[14]](#footnote-14)

* In other places in the NT, this word speaks of the condition of lost people: those who have failed the test and thus are unqualified or depraved.
* So, the word clearly refers to God’s potential eschatological judgment on Paul (and also on the Corinthians). It suggests being rejected as unworthy by the ultimate judge.[[15]](#footnote-15)

What about…

***James 5:19-20 NLT*** *My dear brothers and sisters, if someone among you wanders away from the truth and is brought back,****20****you can be sure that whoever brings the sinner back from wandering will save that person from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.*

James suggests that apostasy can happen among believers.

* To be brought back describes someone who returned to Christ after having left.
* And the reference to one of you brothers and sisters suggests that those involved claimed to be Christians.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Consider…

***2 Peter 2:20-22 NLT*** *And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before.****21****It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life.****22****They prove the truth of this proverb: “A dog returns to its vomit.” And another says, “A washed pig returns to the mud.”*

This passage speaks of the real possibility of apostasy.

* These are believers that Peter is describing, for he says that they **knew** Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and had escaped the corruption of the world. They had given good evidence in the past of having been fully committed followers of Christ.[[17]](#footnote-17)
  + If these were not genuine Christians, then who are?
* And then Peter adds this Jewish detail. He says that those who apostatize are like dogs and pigs (v. 22), in that they foolishly return to the filth of their old lives. Jews would have picked up on this detail since both of these animals were considered unclean (Matt 7.6). Peter shows that those who turn from the faith are also unclean and no longer right with God.

**Church, the Bible describes salvation in conditional terms. It speaks as if apostasy can and does happen.**

It’s not that we commit one sin and then we’re lost again. The way Christians forfeit their salvation is by renouncing Christ and giving up their faith in the Lord.

* We do not believe it’s necessary or easy for a Christian to fall away, but the conditional nature of these promises suggests that it was possible for who had come to Christ to fail to endure, to deny Christ, to fail to be steadfast, and thus forfeit their salvation.[[18]](#footnote-18)

A second reason we believe and teach conditional security…

1. **The possibility of falling away from God’s grace is implied in the many warnings in Scripture not to fall away.**

***1 Corinthians 10:12 NLT*** *If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall.*

The context here reveals that some of the Corinthians clearly thought of themselves as possessing an unconditional spiritual security based on their knowledge and spiritual experiences.

* They were like those in the world today who maintain that we can dally in sin, and refuse to submit to Jesus as Lord, but if we’re saved, we cannot fall away.
  + Paul does not teach a “once saved, always saved” kind of religion; nor does he understand faith as a “once for all” decision for Christ with no impact on how we live thereafter.[[19]](#footnote-19)
* Paul’s warnings throughout this passage are intended to help his readers see that their behavior suggests that they are not nearly as secure as they think they are and that reconsideration of their present attitudes and practices is a matter of great urgency.[[20]](#footnote-20)
* Now, if these Corinthians were secure, why would Paul warn them about falling away?

The Book of Hebrews is filled with warnings which wouldn’t make any sense without at least the possibility of apostasy. For instance…

***Hebrews 3:12-14 NLT*** *Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God.****13****You must warn each other every day, while it is still “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God.****14****For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ.*

**This warning isn’t addressed to unbelievers, it’s addressed to “brothers and sisters” and suggests that they can turn away from God.**

* They can be hardened by sin's deceitfulness if they’re not careful.
* Just as Paul says in Colossians, their share in Christ is contingent on their continued faith in Christ.[[21]](#footnote-21)

In 2 Peter, the apostle warns…

***2 Peter 2:1 NLT*** *But there were also false prophets in Israel, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will cleverly teach destructive heresies and even deny the Master who bought them.*

Many proponents of unconditional security acknowledge the obvious fact that people sometimes abandon their faith. However, they maintain that people who fall away were never just "truly saved" in the first place.

* In this passage, however, Peter explicitly claims that these false teachers denied the Master who bought them. So, apparently, they were once bought with Christ's blood, though it now did them no good.

Peter provides an even more forceful warning a few verses later…

***2 Peter 2:20-21 NLT*** *And when people escape from the wickedness of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and then get tangled up and enslaved by sin again, they are worse off than before.* ***21*** *It would be better if they had never known the way to righteousness than to know it and then reject the command they were given to live a holy life.*

Peter suggests it is possible for people who have been made righteous by knowing Jesus as Lord and Savior to later reject this salvation and end up in a state worse than the one from which they were initially saved.

* If it’s not possible for Christians to choose to turn away from Christ, it’s not clear what Peter is trying to teach in this passage. Nor is it clear what Peter intends to teach when he later warns…
* ***2 Pet. 3:17-18 NLT*** *You already know these things, dear friends. So be on guard; then you will not be carried away by the errors of these wicked people and lose your own secure footing.****18****Rather, you must grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*

If people who are under grace and who know the Lord cannot be carried away, what is the point of warning them about this?[[22]](#footnote-22)

Another interesting warning is found in…

***Romans 11:20-22 NLT*** *Yes, but remember—those branches were broken off because they didn’t believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So don’t think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen.****21****For if God did not spare the original branches, he won’t spare you either.* ***22****Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off.*

This warning is interesting because it would appear to qualify to some degree what Paul said earlier in Romans 8.38-39 about nothing being able to separate us from God's love.

* Apostasy was not mentioned in the list of potential separators. Nothing can separate us from God's redemptive love, not even death or demonic attack.
* However, we can separate ourselves through apostasy.

**Church, there repeated warnings in the Bible about falling away.**

It’s not that we commit one sin and then we’re lost again. The way Christians forfeit their salvation is by renouncing Christ and giving up their faith in the Lord.

* We do not believe it’s necessary or easy for a Christian to fall away, but these repeated warnings suggest that it is possible for saved people to fail to endure, to deny Christ, to fail to be steadfast, and thus forfeit their salvation.[[23]](#footnote-23)

Finally, we believe and teach in the doctrine of conditional security because…

1. **There appear to be examples of apostasy in Scripture.**

For example, in the OT, Saul was once a person who knew and walked with God. In fact, Samuel told Saul that God would bless him and his descendants, if he would remain faithful to the Lord (1 Sam. 13:13). But unfortunately, Saul rebelled against God and became so wicked that God regretted making him king.

***1 Samuel 15:11 NLT*** *“I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command.”…*

* Saul became an example of someone who once enjoyed God's favor but eventually was rejected by God because of his own evil choices.

In the NT Paul says…

***Galatians 5:4,7 NLT*** *For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God’s grace.* ***7*** *You were running the race so well. Who has held you back from following the truth?*

So, at one time his readers had been "running well," but now they weren’t “obeying the truth.”

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul wrote…

***1 Timothy 1:18-20 NLT*** *Timothy, my son, here are my instructions for you, based on the prophetic words spoken about you earlier. May they help you fight well in the Lord’s battles.****19****Cling to your faith in Christ, and keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked.****20****Hymenaeus and Alexander are two examples. I threw them out and handed them over to Satan so they might learn not to blaspheme God.*

* In 2 Timothy, Philetus and Demas are added to the list. Paul gives these men as examples of people who turned away.
* The term “faith” refers to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ[[24]](#footnote-24) and the term reject is just like it sounds.
* The evidence would suggest that there were apostates in the NT church.

If people cannot “shipwreck their faith”, what do we do with Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus?

**Church, the Bible identifies certain people who seemed to fall away from God’s grace.**

The way Christians forfeit their salvation is by renouncing Christ and giving up their faith in the Lord and here we see examples of that…people who are called by name.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**In the COG we believe and teach in conditional security. We believe and teach this doctrine because we believe it is taught in Scripture.**

**However, nothing I have said today has been intended to undermine the assurance and security that we have in Christ.**

* We do not have to go about life worrying about losing our salvation.

Salvation is not something we lose like we lose our wallet. It can be forfeited or abandoned, but that requires a deliberate repudiation of Jesus Christ and persistence in unrepentant sin.

This isn’t easy, for Scripture tells us that the Spirit is present to deal with us when we fall short and empower us to be faithful to the end (Eph 4.30). Christ's intercessory ministry on our behalf is a great comfort as we face temptations and trials (Luke 22.31-32; Heb 7.25).

* Though we stumble at times, Christ is there to forgive and restore.
* And God's faithfulness and power are more than adequate and available, as we continue our journey toward final salvation (1 Cor 1.8-9; 1 Pet 1.5).
* In light of all this, there is no reason why we should not endure to the end and finish the race. God is on our side. He is for us, and his grace is always sufficient.[[26]](#footnote-26)

PAUSE

**So, church, I think the question becomes, what does it mean to continue? That’s Paul’s instruction in Colossians, so what did he mean?**

As one author put it, “To *continue in the faith* is to be content with the gospel that first saved and delivered us from spiritual death and estrangement with God, and brought us straightaway to live in his presence, at peace with him. It is to base our lives and our teaching upon the apostolic doctrines of grace. To be transformed by the truth. It is for those whose confidence that they are reconciled is in Christ’s work *for* us, not in Christ’s work *in* us. It is to be unmoved and immoveable in the face of strong winds of new doctrine, not just when people would deny the apostolic gospel but when, more subtly, they would improve upon it.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

**Swimming in the ocean.**

And church, I think the litmus test here *is whether we are merely hearers of God’s words or doers as well*. Of course, we all fall short and so there will frequently be times when God’s Word rebukes us (that is partly what it is there for). But that attitude is a long way from the one that refuses to acknowledge that Jesus has any rights over us as our Lord and Master and sees his words as merely an opinion. “Why do you call me, “Lord, Lord,” and do not do what I say?”38 asked Jesus.

* If hearing and doing are separated, we have the condition known as ‘apostasy’, in which people heard the gospel and seemingly accepted it, but made no growth, and then turned their backs on it.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Are you stable in the gospel, are you steadfast, are your feet firmly planted upon the truth?

* God is able and willing to preserve us to the end, but we must not forsake him in the process.[[29]](#footnote-29)

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2. Lucas, [*Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bstus72col?ref=Bible.Col1.21-23&off=2155&ctx=+of+course%2c+but+the+~real+discoveries+of+), 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. N. T. Wright, [*Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/tntc72colus?ref=Bible.Col1.23&off=4&ctx=ore+their+king.%0a23.+~This+promise%2c+like+m), vol. 12, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Harold W. Hoehner, Philip W. Comfort, and Peter H. Davids, [*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, Philemon.*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cstonecm70eph?ref=Bible.Col1.23&off=19&ctx=%0a1%3a23+you+must.+The+~Greek+phrase+is+ei+g), vol. 16 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Wright, [*Colossians and Philemon: An Introduction and Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/tntc72colus?ref=Bible.Col1.23&off=844&ctx=rate+echo+of+1%3a4%E2%80%935.%0a~The+verb+%E2%80%98continue%E2%80%99+), 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hoehner, Comfort, and Davids, [*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cstonecm70eph?ref=Bible.Col1.23&off=622&ctx=believe+this+truth.+~%E2%80%9CRemain+in+this+comm), 256. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Douglas J. Moo, [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Col1.23&off=1970&ctx=n+this+verse%2c+then%2c+~a+real+warning.+This), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Moo, [*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/pntccolphm?ref=Bible.Col1.23&off=1832&ctx=to+the+true+gospel.+~Only+by+continuing+i), 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Jackson, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Hoehner, Comfort, and Davids, [*Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cstonecm70eph?ref=Bible.Col1.23&off=622&ctx=believe+this+truth.+~%E2%80%9CRemain+in+this+comm), 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Jackson, 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Boyd and Eddy, 190-191. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
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14. Leadership Ministries Worldwide, [*The First & Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*](https://ref.ly/logosres/posbkjv67co1?ref=Bible.1Co9.27&off=4730&ctx=castaway+(adokimos)+~means+reprobate%2c+rej), The Preacher’s Outline & Sermon Bible (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 1996), 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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16. Thomas D. Lea, [*Hebrews, James*](https://ref.ly/logosres/hntc79heb?ref=Bible.Jas5.19&off=211&ctx=n+Christian+living.+~To+bring+him+back+de), vol. 10, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999), 350. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. R. C. Lucas and Christopher Green, [*The Message of 2 Peter & Jude: The Promise of His Coming*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bstus82pe2?ref=Bible.2Pe2.20-22&off=1740&ctx=+such+present+peril+~had+given+good+evide), The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
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21. Jackson, 147-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Boyd and Eddy, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Boyd and Eddy, 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, [*1, 2 Timothy, Titus*](https://ref.ly/logosres/nac34?ref=Bible.1Ti1.19&off=65&ctx=ce%E2%80%9D+(cf.+1%3a5%3b+3%3a9).+~The+term+%E2%80%9Cfaith%E2%80%9D+ref), vol. 34, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Boyd and Eddy, 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Jackson, 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Lucas, [*Fullness & Freedom: The Message of Colossians & Philemon*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bstus72col?ref=Bible.Col1.23&off=1884&ctx=o+%E2%80%98another%E2%80%99+gospel.%0a~To+continue+in+the+f), 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
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