

Guest Speaker Bill Kittrell

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[0 : 00] The following message was given at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Let me ask you to turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 7. If you don't have a copy of the Scriptures, there's some free Bibles back on the table, right? So you're going to want to follow along.

And while you're turning there, I just say, I'm just so honored to be here. So I know a lot of folks here, they were part of our church for years.

They drove from Athens to come to our church in Knoxville, and then we started this church about a little over a year ago. And I drove down today thinking, what did you guys complain about? It's a nice drive.

Just kidding. I really respect them so much. I love being here. I wish I had more time to commend you. But I will say, I'm just very thankful for all the hard work that you have done over the last year.

[1 : 02] So the church is just enjoying the fruit of your labors. Don't grow weary in doing well.

You're doing good. And pray.

Cast your burdens to the Lord and keep it up. Okay? Okay? That's all I'll say. But I really respect you, and I thank God for you. We're going to look at Mark chapter 7.

We're going to read verses 14 down through 23. And then we're going to look carefully at these verses. This is God's holy inspired word given to us through his authorized representatives.

They witnessed Christ, and they've given us this today, and we want to pay careful attention to it.

So Mark chapter 7, the Gospel of Mark, verse 14. He called the people to him again, and he said to them, Hear me, all of you, and understand there is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him.

But the things that come out of a person are what defile him. And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable.

[2 : 31] And he said to them, Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, Since it enters not his heart, but his stomach, and is expelled?

Thus he declared all foods clean. And he said, What comes out of a person is what defiles him. For from within, out of the heart of man, Come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, Coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person. Merry Christmas.

What a text for Advent, eh? Well, I think Walt was wise to encourage us to take a close look at this text today.

The Advent is about Christ's coming, and what Christ came to do is save us from what these verses are teaching us about.

[4 : 27] And that is sin. And I think Jesus is saying to us today, Listen, understand, and watch out for your greatest enemy.

It's sin. Watch out for it. The warnings from Scripture about sin are very serious.

They're sobering. They're an expression of God's mercy for us to have this today. This is truth. And it's for our good. It may not feel this way.

And I promise you, as pastors, we are tempted to avoid these texts because we want you to like us. We're people too.

But these truths are a gift. And if we really care about our churches as pastors, we'll talk about these. Chris Lungard has written a great book about the doctrine of sin.

[5 : 29] The truth about sin is revealed through Jesus Christ. And he says this, How often do you think about the fact that you carry around in you a deadly companion?

That's what Jesus is talking about. Let me illustrate this. You probably heard about Popeye's chicken sandwich craze.

Have you heard about that? Yeah. According to the Maryland police a few weeks ago, a man was stabbed to death outside a Popeye's restaurant after a fight over these chicken sandwiches. This was all news to me. A 28-year-old man. Two men were in line. And they had set aside a special line for the sandwiches.

If you're here for the chicken sandwich, you get in this designated line. And they got into a fight. And it ended up with the victim being stabbed outside the Popeye's.

[6 : 32] So they got in a fight in the line. And then it ended in the parking lot. The sandwich had debuted in August. It exploded in popularity. It quickly sold out.

It got so Popeye's would say, BYOB, bring your own bun and buy our chicken tenders and make your sandwich because we don't have enough. People started reselling the sandwiches online, marking it up.

600 percent. A man in Tennessee sued Popeye's for emotional trauma and wear and tear in his car because he drove all over town to all the Popeye's and never got his sandwich.

So they canceled it for a while. And then they brought it back this August. They hired 400 extra people to manage.

So hopefully they could manage it better. But then again, the lines formed quickly. And then this man was murdered. They caught him a few days later. He was staring at the camera in the Popeye's.

[7 : 35] I mean, he couldn't get away with it. But he got in a fight over a chicken sandwich and murdered somebody.

The point is, it's not the chicken sandwich, is it? This man didn't sit around and think, you know what I'm going to do today?

I'm going to kill somebody over a chicken sandwich. It's, the truth is that murder is in the heart. It's what's within. That's what Jesus is teaching us.

It's in the heart. Sinclair Ferguson says this, the power of indwelling sin is no less real in the believer than it is in the unbeliever.

And that needs to get our attention. This text is drawing our attention to the power of sin. It's active. It's hostile. It's indwelling. It's hostile to following Christ.

[8 : 37] If you choose to follow Christ, you're going to experience opposition. This is what Paul's talking about in Galatians chapter 5. The apostle Paul in the New Testament writing a letter to a group of churches.

He says, the desires of the flesh, remaining sin, in the believer are against the spirit. And the desires of the spirit are against remaining sin.

They're opposed to each other. So when you become a Christian, like Bo was talking about being born again, what you're going to notice is a conflict. conflict. And actually, sometimes Christians can be discouraged by this conflict, but that actually is a sign of new life.

A sign, what Bo was talking about, new spiritual life. When you come to Christ, you're born again, but you're not perfected yet, are you?

And so there's a battle. There's an opposition. John Owen, a 17th century theologian, said it like this, there is no duty we perform for God that sin does not oppose.

[9 : 47] And the more spirituality or holiness there is in it, in what we do, the greater is its enmity to it, its strife, its opposition. Those who seek most for God experience the strongest opposition.

So if you choose to do Walt's Bible plan and read it, you're going to be opposed. Remaining sin is going to want you not to do that. So today's a good day to just kind of think about, do a little test, evaluate, and think a little soul check.

Listen to these truths and see where are we blind to the state of our own soul? Maybe you've come here today and you're not a believer. Maybe this text will provoke you to see the effects of sin in your life.

Maybe you are a Christian. So how are you doing in relationship to the Lord, in your marriage, in your parenting? How is sin affecting you?

How are we progressing in Christlikeness? So I trust this will be a helpful text this morning. Let me give you a little context first. The Pharisees saw that some of Jesus' disciples ate with hands that were defiled.

[11:04] That is, they were unwashed. And so in the previous text prior to this in Mark 7, they asked Jesus why his disciples didn't live according to the religious traditions, the traditions of the elders, which went into great detail about what made a person clean or unclean.

They weren't talking about, you know, avoiding germs. It wasn't wash your hands before you eat so you won't get sick. It was about spiritual cleanliness.

And they were all about washing. So you'd wash your hands, you'd wash your cups, your pots, your couch, vessels. It was all, they had all these traditions.

And Jesus, in Mark 7, he responds to them by calling them hypocrites. He says, your heart is far from God. You've got all these rules, all these external things, but your heart, that's the problem. You honor God with your lips, but your worship is in vain. And so he's addressing them here in verse 14 in our text. He says, it says, Mark says, he called the people to him again.

[12:16] And he's in this context. He's talking about the Pharisees. They're misleading the people. They're hypocrites. And he looks at the crowds and he says, hear me. All of you, understand.

This is God's word and it's an urgent appeal from the one who came. Jesus Christ, hear me. And we can hear him speaking to us this morning.

Understand. God's word has been perverted by these religious people. And Jesus wants them to hear the truth.

Don't accept their teaching. In verse 18, he says, he says to his disciples, are you without understanding too? This is so important that you get this.

He recognizes he needs to slow down and make this clear. Do you not understand? Don't you see the truth? What goes in from the outside, external religion, doesn't defile you.

[13:15] It doesn't go into your heart. A person can't be made unclean in God's eyes by something that doesn't affect the heart.

So these washings, they don't make you clean. Eating with unwashed hands doesn't defile you in God's sight. It's what comes out of your heart. It's the evil things within your heart.

That's what makes you truly unclean. Don't you see this? So the Lord is saying to his disciples, and I think through his word to us today, I want you to hear this.

I want you to understand it's very, very important truth. The Pharisees focus on externals. Like so many religious people in Tennessee, in Athens, in Knoxville, so many religious people all over the world, they focus on externals.

They don't see that what is unclean about people is the heart. And Jesus is imparting truth. Hear me. The Greek is, listen.

[14:22] It occurs nine times in this gospel, and every single time, Jesus is saying something very, very urgent, serious.

It's sobering, isn't it? Listen, all of you. We need to understand, we need to hear what he's saying, and we need to get this.

It's what's inside. But the very thing he's talking about will keep us from understanding remaining sin. So because of remaining sin, we're really slow to get this.

And that's why he's talking to his disciples and saying, you're not getting it, are you? Yeah. There's no verse 16. If you have an ESV version of the Bible, there's no verse 16.

So it's worth the price of admission just to come today and learn, hey, what happened to verse 16? Well, if you look in the footnote, the verse says, if any man has ears to hear, let him hear.

[15:28] It probably was not in what Mark originally wrote. but Jesus certainly said this at other times and he may have said it in this context. But it's very relevant.

You need spiritual ears to hear what the Lord is saying here, don't you? Because our remaining sin will prevent us from hearing this spiritually and seeing this spiritually.

Eyes of our heart, the ears of our heart, if you will. So he's talking about a spiritual hearing and our indwelling sin is going to resist us. So before we look at what we want to get out of this, I'm just going to briefly pray and ask the Lord, Lord, give us ears to hear.

We want to leave today and get this, okay? So would you pray with me, Lord? Thank you for your word. I specifically pray today, Lord, that you would impart truth that nobody would leave today misunderstanding what you are teaching.

Open up the eyes of our heart, Lord. I pray that you would give us ears to hear and give us understanding. Give us the gift of illumination.

[16:45] I know you're present today, Lord, through your spirit. I know you're eager to answer this prayer and I pray that every individual would benefit benefit from this truth today and they would leave with understanding and know you better as a result of their time with us this morning.

I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So what do we need to hear from this text? Number one, I'm going to make three points. Number one, sin makes a person unclean.

Sin makes a person unclean. Verse 15. There is nothing outside a person. This is actually a parable. We know that because we're told that in verse 17.

It doesn't really sound much like a parable but we're told this is a parable. There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him.

But the things that come out of a person are what defile him. It's a parable teaching us about what makes you pure in God's sight.

[17:50] What makes you impure, unclean in God's sight. It's sin that makes us clean or unclean in God's sight. It's sin.

Not formalities, not external religious activities. It's sin. Purity doesn't depend on washing in a religious way or not washing or touching things or not touching them or eating certain foods.

You can go enjoy a Popeye's chicken sandwich today and you won't be unclean. The closest one is in Maryville. I looked it up for you. I know you're wanting one. So that's not what makes you clean or unclean.

Foods. The Jewish people, the context for Jesus' teaching, were all in agreement that eating certain foods made you unclean.

It defiled the person. It meant the person needed to be clean. They were unholy before God. And Jesus comes to town and says, that is not true.

[19:01] That is false doctrine. And he reverses the flow. It's inner impurity. That defiles things outside.

Oh, man. There is so much opposition to this because it is truth. And as I grew in understanding of this over the years, it transformed my life to understand the battle that I was engaged in.

And it transformed my parenting to understand what was going on with my kids. They hadn't lost their mind. They were just sinners. There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him.

He knows what he is about to say is critical, so he makes it very sobering. And in verse 17, it says, when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples ask him about the parable.

So whenever there is a really, really important truth, Jesus will take his disciples aside somewhere. And Mark is the author of this gospel.

[20:13] And he is wanting you to understand this is big. And so he's pulling his disciples aside and it's like today, he's pulling us aside.

He left the people. He entered the house. And then his disciples ask him about the parable. It's not that they're stupid. It's that there's opposition to understanding revealed truth.

They don't understand. They don't see. They're like a dog. Buddy and I, we both have black Labrador retrievers and we love to train our dogs.

And they're like this dog that you point the finger. Look, I want you to go to the right. And the dog just looks at your finger. He doesn't know, oh, I want you to go that way.

And you have to train him to do that. That's what, they're looking at the finger and they're not getting the truth. They are like looking at stained glass windows from the outside.

[21:23] It just looked dull and lifeless. Jesus wants to bring them on the inside and show them the beauty of the truth. Believe it or not, this text is beautiful.

It's revealing. It's a gift from God. If we get this, it'll change our lives. The second truth that springs from this, sin makes a person unclean.

The second truth is, sin dwells in the heart of man. Sin dwells. It flows from the inside to the outside. We don't see our heart.

I don't see your heart. I don't know your heart. We look on the outside, but God sees both. He sees the outside and the inside.

That's why Jesus said, verse 19, whatever goes into a person from an outside can't defile him since it enters not his heart. And that's where God's focus is.

[22:21] It doesn't enter his heart. That's where God is looking. And so Mark steps onto the stage, which he rarely does, in verse 19, and parenthetically, thus he declared all foods clean.

This was a huge question for the Christian community because the Jewish people had cleaned and unclean foods. Mark is writing this gospel primarily to Roman Gentile Christians, and he is saying to them, all foods are clean.

That's what Jesus declared. It was a huge question. Why is it clean? Because it doesn't go into the heart. God's looking at the heart. It's like the Lord said to Samuel, don't look on his appearance.

The Lord sees not as man sees. Man looks on the outward appearance. The Lord looks on the heart. So Jesus is teaching us that the behaviors that we see come out of the heart.

And what we really need to deal with is the heart. So for example, down in verse 22, he mentions an evil thing, slander. Speaking evil about someone.

[23 : 32] You're not with them, so you're talking to your neighbor, and you say something evil about them. It defiles a person because it comes out of a person from within, out of their heart.

That's what makes them unclean. A good question to ask someone who is slandering someone to you is, listen, why are you telling me this?

Is it love? Is it a servant's heart? Are you trying to serve the Lord and serve other people? Or is it pride?

Or is it selfishness? Why are you telling me this? That's what Jesus is trying to get at. So if you look back in Mark chapter 7 to verse 6, he quotes Isaiah, and he's, it's all about this outside inside.

Watch. Verse 6, and he said to them, well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites as it is written, look, the outside, this people honors me with their lips, the inside, but their hearts is far from me.

[24 : 47] Their heart is far from me. In vain do they worship me. Okay? Inside, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men. That's what's on the outside.

And the Bible reveals the heart. It discerns the intentions of the heart. So Jesus said, verse 18, do you not see that whatever goes into a person from the outside can't defile him since it enters not his heart.

So, were the food rules of the Pharisees to be obeyed by Christians? The answer is no. Why? Because what defiles a person comes from within, not from without.

That's the context. So verse 20, here's the meat of it. What comes out of a person is what defiles him.

For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.

[26 : 07] All these evil things come from within. Jerry Bridges said, all of us tend to underestimate the remaining sin of our lives.

The reason we sin is because we're sinful. Christians are justified, but they're justified sinners. We still have to battle indwelling sin. What makes us unclean is our sinful heart, which the blood of Jesus cleanses us from.

J.C. Ryle, a 19th century Anglican pastor, said, the wickedness of men is often attributed to bad examples. Bad company, peculiar temptations, or the snares of the devil.

It seems forgotten that every man carries within him a fountain of wickedness. We need no bad company to teach us, no devil to tempt us in order to run into sin.

We have within us the beginning of every sin under heaven. Now that is not something you're going to hear every day in our culture, but that is biblical truth.

[27 : 18] We sin because sin remains in our hearts. He, J.C. Ryle, applied this to parents as we raise our children.

We can never forget that the seeds of all mischief is in their hearts. He said, it's not enough to keep boys and girls at home, shut out every outward temptation.

They carry within them a heart ready for any sin, and until that heart is changed, they aren't safe. Whatever we do, that's what we have to focus on is their hearts.

I had the joy to be with Walt and Buddy and Taylor at a pastor's conference a few weeks ago. We had a great time, got to spend some time together, really enjoyed all that the Lord was doing there, and I was flying back and I was on the jetway behind a mother with a little two-year-old boy, and he seemed to be doing just fine.

I thought he was cute. I'm a grandfather. I have seven kids. I love children, and I just thought, this is a great little boy, but his mother was scared.

[28 : 38] She was very clearly nervous. She knew what was coming, and I thought it was odd, but I picked up. We were in the jetway forever.

I don't like jetways, and we were going on this very crowded plane, and I knew exactly what was going to happen because I knew the Lord was at work. I was going to be sitting right beside this little boy, and sure enough, I was.

When we got on the plane, it was packed, and I was sitting beside them, packed together, and I knew this mother was having a hard time, and in my, you know, remaining sin was like, oh, great. Look at this. I got to sit by this kid, get kicked the whole time, but by the grace of God, I looked at them because I did want to comfort her, and I said, I was hoping I would get to sit by you. That was a lie, but was it a good lie? You know, I don't know. I need your counsel after the meeting, so I need your prayers, but I really did.

[29 : 44] I was trying to encourage you. I said, this is perfect. I have seven grandchildren. I'm the perfect guy to sit by you. She had every imaginal distraction for this kid.

She had food. She had earplugs for the video for him to watch. She had toys. She sang out loud. She wasn't a great singer to try to entertain him. Nothing quieted him down.

He kicked and screamed and threw a fit throughout that flight. I still have bruises to prove it. She was unbelievable. She never one time got angry.

She was totally patient. She just kept serving him. We got off that plane. She was headed to another flight, and my heart went out to her. What's wrong with that little boy?

Well, he's just like you. That's his problem. He's just like me. Foolishness is bound up in his heart. Listen to what Proverbs says. Gift from God for all the parents.

[30 : 46] Proverbs 22, 15. Folly is bound up in the heart of a child. That's exactly what Jesus said. Foolishness is in the heart, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him.

I'm just reading the Bible. Proverbs 23, 13. Do not withhold discipline from a child. If you strike him with a rod, he will not die.

I'm not adding any comments. Proverbs 29, 15. The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.

I would just say one thing. Parents, shepherd your child's heart by the grace of God. Third truth, sin produces evil things.

Sin produced. Number one, sin makes a person unclean. Number two, sin dwells in the heart. Number three, sin produces evil things. A man was murdered over a chicken sandwich.

[31 : 53] It's tragic. It is absolutely tragic. It's the power of indwelling sin.

It's evil things. The scribes and the Pharisees would often list all the violations of their rules. In our text, Jesus lists the deeper evils of the heart.

heart. Here's a catalog of evils in verses 20 through 23. Now, you need to understand he's not talking about why this is a really bad guy.

This is everybody. He's speaking of all people. Everyone has a heart like this. Bo is, Bo's testimony is so helpful because he's pointing the finger at how God has changed his heart and there's fruit in it and he wants you to know, hey, that's the grace of God.

That's what he's saying. The seeds of all kinds of evil are within each person and that's why self-righteousness is the most unreasonable sin.

[33 : 10] So if we look at the man that killed a man over a chicken sandwich, like we are better than him, that is self-righteousness. We don't appreciate what Jesus is saying.

John Stott, a well-known 20th century theologian, said, at every stage of our Christian development and in every sphere of our Christian discipleship, pride is the greatest enemy.

You could say self-righteousness is the greatest enemy and humility is our greatest friend. These verses are so helpful. Okay, so what comes out of us from within?

There are 12 words here. The first six are about evil acts. The first one, sexual immorality. The Greek is porneia and it's where we get the word pornography.

Sexual immorality. It was understood to cover any sexual activity outside of marriage between a man and a woman.

[34 : 14] Adultery, fornication, prostitution, homosexuality. If someone tells you otherwise, they are communicating false doctrine.

the Bible is very clear. This sense was only intensified in the New Testament.

It was in the Old Testament, clearly intensified in the New. Any kind of extramarital or unnatural sexual activity is condemned in Scripture.

other evil acts, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, greed, wickedness.

The last six words are attitudes, deceit, lying, misleading, cheating, sensuality. What's he mean by sensuality? It's a passion for physical pleasure.

[35 : 21] It's idolatry. It's liking nice weather or beautiful scenery or sexual activity or luxurious vacations.

Liking nice weather isn't evil, but when we worship nice weather, when you walk out and say, this is a lousy day, complaining about the weather, that's when we're getting at the heart of sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness, all of these are lodged in the heart.

It's not what is outside a person that makes them unclean. This is what does it. So, one point of application, ask for correction.

Invite correction. Hold your applause. Ask for input. Input. You know, one of the things, if you're a parent and your kids are in children's ministry today, one of the things you can do is thank the children's ministry workers, and then you can say, any observations?

This little guy has foolishness bound up in his heart, and you may have observed it. Do you have any you could share with me? Invite and pursue! Here's one pastor told this story.

[36 : 57] He said, as I sat with my family at a local breakfast establishment, I noticed a finely dressed man at the adjacent table, his Armani suit, it's a little dated, I don't even know what an Armani suit is, but his Armani suit and stiffly pressed shirt coordinated perfectly with a power tie.

I don't think we wear power ties anymore, but they used to. His wingtip shoes, I still have those, sparkled from a recent shine, every hair was in place, including his perfectly groomed mustache. The man sat alone eating a bagel as he clearly was preparing for a meeting, and as he reviewed the papers before him, he appeared nervous, glancing frequently at his Rolex watch, we still have those, it was obvious he had an important meeting ahead.

The man stood up, and I watched as he straightened his tie and prepared to leave. Immediately I noticed a blob of cream cheese attached to his finely groomed mustache.

He was about to go into the world dressed in his finest with cream cheese on his face. I thought of the business meeting he was about to attend. Who would tell him?

[38 : 05] Should I? What if no one did? What if no one told him? He would walk into the meeting with cream cheese on his face.

So the question is, do you know where sin is showing up in your life? We're just wise to say, would you please be honest with me and give me your thoughts?

Listen, understand what Jesus is saying. Watch out for sin. It is not your friend. It is not your friend. God. It is your enemy.

It is opposed to you. These traditions, religious formalities, they don't have the power to deal with this, but Jesus does.

That's why we can invite and pursue correction and not be paralyzed when we find out, oh my goodness, I did something sinful.

[39 : 10] we can because we have a Savior. We're going to celebrate communion here in a minute. What we're celebrating is that Jesus transforms the heart by his grace.

He changes us, doesn't he? The blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. So Jesus came, and Christmas is a great time where we celebrate the birth of Christ, but he came for Easter, he came to live a perfect life, so that his righteous life could be counted as ours by faith.

We're united to him by faith. We trust in him alone for our salvation. So we believe God accepts us, not because of our righteous acts, but because of his life.

And then an innocent man, the only innocent man, he died on the cross for our sins as our substitute, and we trust we're united to him by faith so that when he died on the cross, God poured out his wrath on our sin, the wrath we deserved on our Savior.

We trust that our sins are forgiven. We trust that his wrath is satisfied for every sin we've ever committed, past, present, future, we're forgiven.

[40 : 30] And then he was raised from the dead, and we're united to him by faith into this new life that Bo was talking about. And so because of the gospel, we can face our sin.

We're the one person, the group of people that can face our sin because we trust that we're forgiven, and we can be changed, and we can overcome our sin by the grace of God.

We're united to him in his death and resurrection. Let me leave you with a promise of the new covenant in Christ from Ezekiel 36. This is in the Old Testament, written hundreds of years before the first Christmas day.

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and he's talking about the heart, and from all your idols I will cleanse you, and I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you, and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh, and I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and be careful to obey my rules.

Lord, today, we give you thanks for the promises of the new covenant. Lord, I thank you for everyone in this room. I don't know where they're coming from, what their relationship with you is like, but I pray, Father, today for the gift of faith.

[42 : 02] I pray that people would believe today. They came today, and they were believers. I pray their faith in you would be encouraged. They'd be encouraged that you do indeed forgive our sins, and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If they came today, and they're not a Christian, I pray, Father, they would know the good news about Christ, and that they would respond in faith to this free offer of the grace of God.

Lord, we give you all the glory today, and we give you thanks in Jesus' name. Amen. You've been listening to a message at a Sunday celebration at Trinity Grace Church in Athens.

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