

## **The Ten Commandments Sermons from the Heidelberg Catechism**

### **Rev. G. Van Reenen**

“Many ministers have written sermons on the fifty-two Lord's Days as we find them in our Heidelberg Catechism. One of these ministers and servants of the Most High, is the late Rev. G. Van Reenen, of the Netherlands. When he was not able to preach any more because of a throat ailment, God inclined his heart to write sermons, and work while it was day. This work he continued until the day of his death in the year 1946. Rev. Van Reenen has written these sermons for the common people. In all these sermons he breathes the spirit of humility and self-denial. Throughout all these sermons he indicates the necessity of knowing by experience these three important parts, misery, redemption, and gratitude, as he himself was not a stranger thereof. Rev. Van Reenen does not know that his Catechism sermons and others have been translated into the English language. He confessed in his life not to be worthy of any honor or praise; that we may then by grace give all honor and praise to Israel's God and King, saying with the Psalmist, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory, for Thy mercy and for Thy truth's sake.” Psalm 115:1. (Pastor J. Van Zweden).

Reprinted and Translated from the Holland by the Netherlands Reformed congregations in America (1955). This series on the Ten Commandments was taken from the W. B. Eerdmans' December, 1979 edition of the book, The Heidelberg Catechism, by Rev. G. Van Reenen.

### **“THE NINTH COMMANDMENT”**

Psalter No.89 st. 1, 2.  
Read James 3.  
Psalter No. 24 st. 1,2.  
Psalter No.231 st. 1, 3.  
Psalter No.10 st. 2, 3.

### **XLIII. LORD'S DAY.**

Dear hearers,

One of the precious gifts which the Lord gave to man is the ability to see.

It has pleased the dear Lord to place a pair of wonderful little windows in our head by which we can see each other and can see so much and so far. What a blessing that is, is best understood by those who lack these windows, and by those whose windows are closed, by those who are blind. What those blind people lack is so much and so grievous, that it breaks our heart. The author experienced this recently when a dear

friend and colleague visited him, one to whom he was bound with close ties, but who now was blind.<sup>1</sup>

Another of those precious gifts is the ability to walk, that we can stand and walk on two legs wherever we please. What a loss it is when we lack that ability, when with Jacob one thigh is out of joint. But then if we are lame on both our feet, as Mephibosheth, and confined to our chair, it is much worse. How much trouble and misery that man experienced because of it, and lameness was one reason why the impotent man lay thirty-eight years at Bethesda.

And then, what a wonderful and unusual gift is the ability to speak! Animals also can see and can walk, but speech is a gift the Lord gave to the children of men only. Truly it can never be fully appreciated. For speech is the conveyer of our thoughts, the means by which men commune with each other, the means by which we can tell each other what we feel and what we see, what we hope and what we fear, what we hate and what we love.

By the use of speech we can hear what we have become through sin, but also who God in Christ will be for malefactors and hell-worthy creatures.

And what a glorious privilege it is to talk together, to pray and give thanks together, to sing together of the praises of God, etc.

Yet this gift, because of sin, often changes into a curse. Does not the Apostle James says: "The tongue, hence speech, is a fire, a world of iniquity?" He says, "The tongue is a member that defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." He says that our tongue "is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made in the similitude of God." Our tongue needs a bridle, and God gave us one, of which we must now speak.

You will find our text in Exodus 20:16: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

Upon these words our Catechetical Instruction is based as you will find recorded in the Heidelberg Catechism:

### **XLIII. LORD'S DAY.**

**Q. 112. What is required in the ninth commandment?**

**A. That I hear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper**

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. H. A. Minderman.

**works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor.**

Dear Hearers!

The previous Lord's Day we considered in accordance with the eighth commandment, the faithfulness and gracious care which the Lord has and shows concerning that which He has sovereignly given men.

We showed you the high necessity of this commandment, which was evident from man's thievish nature, and from the extent and the unreasonableness of this sin.

And now if only we could say in truth: Gehazi, Achan and others of that type are thieves, but we are free from such sins, — but none of us can say that in truth. On the contrary, he who has learned to know himself by the light of the Spirit, knows that not all thieves are in prisons. God's child often is amazed that he is not imprisoned. He does not ascribe that to his honest character, but rather to God's restraining grace which prevented him from enriching himself unlawfully with his neighbor's goods. For the fact that he is still at liberty, he gives the glory to God!

In the sight of the Lord we are all thieves. In His sight there are no degrees of thievery; before Him all are alike. And should we, who already in Adam have stolen from God, and who daily rob God of His honor, think ourselves too good to stretch out our rapacious hands to the property of our neighbor?

Happy is the man who is prevented from committing the act. And blessed is the man, who apprehended by the Law is brought as a thief and robber before the Highest Judge. Certainly, such a man is most afraid! He expects nothing else but to be eternally east with all the spiritual and material robbers and thieves into the prison of hell by that all-knowing and incorruptibly just Judge. That is what he expects, that he would deem just, such a one acknowledges the right of God to punish him eternally; such a one accepts the punishment of his iniquity. However, such a one is not punished, but receives pardon, for the sake of Him who restored that which He took not away.

Now in connection with the ninth commandment we must speak of the dreadful sin of bearing false witness, and that in accordance with Question 112.

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor,” thus reads the ninth commandment, and more learned men than we agree this commandment is not hard to understand.

Yet we would like in the first place to elucidate it with a few words.

When in this commandment we read of our neighbors, the term includes all people,

none excluded, not even our enemies. Since God has made of one blood all nations, of men we are all each others' neighbors. Of all these we must suppose that they are on the earth according to God's will and law as one community, with mutual interests and giving mutual help. But then it is most essential that each one practices truth and justice.

Therefore the Highest Lawgiver calls to them with a loud voice from Mount Sinai, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor."

A false witness is a witness or testimony in which the words do not agree with the facts, nor with the intention of the speaker. For example, when the Pharisees in Matt 12:24 say of the Lord Jesus, "This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub, the prince of the devils," they gave false witness, not only because it was untrue, but also because they knew better. When in Gen. 42:38 Jacob says that his son Joseph is dead, he spoke an untruth, but gave no false witness, because he truly believed an evil beast had rent him in pieces and devoured him.

Bearing witness is permitted, yea, one is obligated to do so, as we see in Deut. 19:15. But to give false witness is utterly despicable. It is so for every one, but especially for God's covenant people.

A good name is one's best possession here on earth. In Prov. 22:1 Solomon says, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches," and in Eccl. 7:1 "A good name is better than precious ointment." The heathens also considered a good name to be sufficient wealth.

By giving false witness we often cause our neighbor to lose his good name, we rob him of that which is his dearest possession, after God and grace. And not only that, but we make it impossible for him to live with honorable people, for no one wants to communicate with one who has a bad name.

And yet this is a very extensive sin. Notice what the catechism answers to the question: "What is required in the ninth commandment?" Our Instructor explains the commandment in two respects, namely, what is forbidden and what is commanded in this commandment.

(a) What is forbidden?

In this commandment God forbids the giving of false witness generally. This can be done inwardly, by our thoughts, by suspecting our neighbor. How prone man is to suspect his neighbor of this or that sin! We are reminded of the old Eli who suspected the imploring and pleading Hannah of drunkenness when she was pouring out her troubled heart before the Lord (1 Sam. 1:18). Thus the Jews also spoke of the Apostles in their blessed state on Pentecost, "These men are full of new wine. And alas it is still so. When God's people are in a blissfully happy state, the world, especially the pious world, says, "They are out of their mind."

The barbarians thought Paul was a murderer whom vengeance suffered not to live, because an adder clung to his hand. (Acts 28:1-4).

Neither are we free from that sin. How far we are from that love which thinks no evil. Dear hearers, let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor!

But this transgression is also committed outwardly, by shooting out the lip and shaking the head, as they did with the Lord Jesus. He complained in Ps. 22, "The lip they curl, the head they shake." And especially is it done by that little member, the tongue, particularly by bearing false witness. The people of Israel were often called upon to bear witness, for the Lord had said, "At the mouth of two witnesses, or at the mouth of three witnesses, shall the matter be established."

And no one might give untrue testimony, for God's Word teaches us: "A false witness shall perish."

And what God forbade in Israel, He also forbids us. We, too, are forbidden to bear false witness.

And yet how often this commandment formerly was and still is transgressed grossly.

Notice what happens in the courts of judgment, there where justice should be upheld, where men should love the right and righteousness. Oh, how the ninth commandment is transgressed there by judges who pronounce rash sentences without having heard both sides sufficiently, or without giving the matter sufficient consideration, hence, without sufficient evidence, condemning the just, and justifying, that is acquitting the wicked. Nicodemus would say, "Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him and know what he doeth?" John 7:51.

It is transgressed by judges who pronounce unjust sentences because of preference, prejudice or for profit. This grievous sin is forbidden in Deut. 16:19, "Thou shalt not wrest judgment, thou shalt not respect persons, neither take a gift." For this reason justice is symbolized by a blind-folded woman, holding a pair of balances. King Jehoshaphat did well when he impressed the judges in his kingdom with the importance of their office, saying, "Take heed, what you do; for ye judge not for man, but for the Lord, who is with you in judgment. Wherefore now let the fear of the Lord be upon you; take heed and do it: for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." (2 Chron. 19:6, 7)

But this commandment is also transgressed terribly by accusers who rashly accuse someone without cause. Thus Doeg, the Edomite, accused David before Saul, thereby causing the death of eighty-five innocent priests of the Lord. The Lord Jesus, also, who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, was nevertheless accused falsely before the Jewish council.

No less is this commandment transgressed by the defendants who deny their guilt,

sometimes even with an oath and by swearing, and even before the Highest Judge. Think of Cain who brazenly dared to answer the Lord, "Am I my brother's keeper? I do not know where he is." Yet he knew very well where his brother was, for he had killed him.

This sin is also committed by witnesses who are false and therefore bear false witness. I need but remind you of those sons of Belial who said of Naboth that he had blasphemed God and the King, and only to rob him of his father's inheritance and enrich the wicked Ahab thereby, Also against the Lord Jesus in the hall of Caiaphas did false witnesses arise.

Lawyers and attorneys also often transgress the ninth commandment. They usually think they must make bad matters good and good matters bad. But this is contrary to God's commandment. The Lord pronounces woe upon them. (Isaiah 5:20) "Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" Lawyers who manage to gain an acquittal for malefactors may be much honored and sought after here below, but they shall not enter heaven, except they repent of their sins and be converted to God.

But also outside of the courts, in everyday life among men people transgress the ninth commandment terribly.

It is done by falsifying men's words giving them a different meaning than the speaker or writer intended. Take for example what Jesus said concerning the temple of His body and how the Jews falsified that statement. The meaning can be entirely changed by misplacing the emphasis or by omitting a part of a sentence. Thus I can say that David is an atheist because he said, "There is no God." Did David say that? Certainly, but something preceded those words. "The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God." That is the way David said it. Do you see that a half-truth can be a dreadful lie? And yet it happens so often that men's words are falsified and given another meaning.

The Instructor also mentions backbiting. There are almost no more dangerous persons than backbiters and whisperers. They are called thus because they are too good (?) to tell one's faults to his face and therefore do it in his absence, behind his back! And then they would not speak about it aloud, and therefore they whisper it. Hence they are called backbiters and whisperers. David calls such backbiters evil speakers, who shall not be established in the earth. (Ps. 140:11) The Jews called them "people who talk with a third tongue" and the Apostle lists this sin among the sins of heathens. Rom 1:30.

The Instructor also speaks of slanderers. A slanderer is one who wilfully spreads an untruth and scatters lies to the detriment of his neighbor. The world is filled with such people. They are more dangerous than thieves and murderers, for one can, in a measure guard against thieves and murderers, but no locks or bars are effective against slander. Such slanderers were Shimei who slandered David, and Ziba who slandered the lame Mephibosheth. It was too bad that David on that occasion acted like a credulous person with whom slanderers find an open ear.

The ninth commandment is also transgressed by “all sorts of lies.” This is done when we say with words what we do not think or mean, hence against light and better knowledge.

The Instructor speaks of “all sorts” of lies and deceit. And indeed, there are lies of various sorts.

There are lies spoken for pleasure, without harming or helping anyone, just for a jest. These lies are also contrary to the ninth commandment, and hence sin, for thereby we deny the truth and make a sport of sin. Let us never forget that in the day of days we shall give account of every idle word spoken. Therefore Paul writes to the Ephesians, and hence also to us, “Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient let them not be once named among you, but rather giving of thanks.” “Charity rejoices in the truth,” we read, but not in lies. The fact that we amuse ourselves with lies indicates our decadence.

There are lies told for the sake of politeness. When, in order to keep ourselves humble, we minimize the gifts and graces we have received from God, we are unjust to ourselves and unthankful to the Giver. Intelligent people soon observe that we do not mean what we say and that we are abasing ourselves only to be the more honored.

There are also lies told for the sake of politeness about others, often to flatter others, to exalt him more than he himself knows he deserves. When the people said of Herod's oration, “It is the voice of a god, and not of a man,” that was flattery. And because that worm of the dust did not reprove the flattering tongue, he died in a terrible, painful and horrible manner. This type of lying is often found in the courts of kings and among other great men. There it is customary to exalt one another. King David did not want it. He says, (Ps. 12:2,3) “They speak vanity every one with his neighbor: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak. The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaketh proud things.” If more of the rulers spoke thus, they would not ask with Pilate, “What is truth?” Then the truth would be told them more often.

Then there are also shameful lies, lies spoken to deceive and injure our neighbor, either personally or in their good name or business. Such lies are an abomination to the Lord. Such liars shall surely be punished. (Prov. 19:5) “A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.”

And the Jesuits speak of “White lies” as though they are not sin. They are abominable sins, told for the purpose of deception by ambiguous words which may convey a different meaning than the obvious one.

Men also speak of little lies of convenience to help one out of an emergency. Thus Abraham said Sarah was his sister, so they would not think she was his wife. Such also were the lies of the midwives of Egypt, and of Jacob, who lied to his old father, saying he was Esau. My hearers, the world is full of lies, also of these “lies of convenience.” But God does not need our lies to help us out of our difficulties. Wrong never becomes

right, no matter what the circumstances are.

He who lies and deceives, who slanders and back-bites his neighbor invokes the terrible wrath of God.

And that is no wonder when we consider the origin of this sin. This sin comes from hell. Lying and slandering are the work of the devil. He is the father of lies. His name "devil" means slanderer. The false tongue is according to James "set on fire of hell."

Lying and deceiving come forth from the corrupt spring of our being. We are born as liars and slanderers, and therefore we are a web of lies and deceit.

Ah, my hearers, it is because of our enmity against God and our neighbors that we lie and slander each other.

Would not God's anger burn over such a sin?

Oh, that wicked heart, and that tongue set on fire of hell, that unruly evil, how much misery it has caused, what a world of troubles that little member has wrought! Its slain are many, they cannot be numbered. By lying and deceiving it has caused thrones to waver, it has destroyed kingdoms, it has filled the battle fields with maimed bodies, the nation with disturbances, church with schisms and the abyss with lost ones.

How many hearts are permanently estranged from each other by the sin of slander! How many families has it disrupted and filled with strife and discord. Entire generations are as it were unraveled by lies and slander. How many people are murdered by it. It cost Naboth his life and it hanged our Lord upon the cross. Moreover, by lying and slandering we violate God's perfections. By bearing false witness we deny God's truth and omniscience. Would the Holy One then not punish that sin? Shall not His soul be avenged on such a nation as this?

Observe then how He punishes these sins:

(a) In the conscience of the slanderer. Oh, that conscience! How it can torment the sinner and poison his pleasure! They have enjoyed robbing their neighbor of his honor, and marring his good name. But now comes the tormenter within, the hammer of God begins to pound terribly; their lying and slandering has come to an end; now the slanderer is afraid of the effects, of death and of judgment. How many slanderers feel here already the sparks of hell, and start to gnaw their wicked tongues for sorrow of heart. That is the avenging hand of God, that is a foretaste of that which shall be the slanderer's portion for ever.

(b) The slanderers lose their respect. They are considered dishonorable. When they say or affirm anything, people do not believe them. "It is a slanderer who says it, so it is not true." Thus people speak of them. They are not trusted, even in small matters. The Jews placed slanderers on a par with slaves, neither of whom were considered worthy

to be called as witnesses.

(c) Their mischief returns upon their own head. It is with the slanderer as with one who throws out ashes against the wind, it comes back in his face and on his clothes.

(d) And his deathbed is terrible! He must appear before God. Now he must justify his lies and slanderings! That will be terrible! Then he will be eternally cast into hell, with all the thieves, murderers, adulterers, covetous and liars, in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

Or do you think we are drawing too dark a picture? Notice then the dreadful retribution of God in the examples which are recorded for us. Ahab met Elijah on the field of Naboth, the wicked Jezebel was eaten by the dogs. What happened to the lying Gehazi? The leprosy of Naaman cleaved unto him. Think also of Haman and his false accusation. He himself was hanged on the gallows intended for Mordecai. Notice the brothers of Joseph. For twenty years the lie they told their father concerning Joseph burned in their hearts, for twenty years they had to silence their conscience. Hear them speaking to each other in Joseph's palace, (Gen. 42:21,22). "We are verily guilty concerning our brother in that we saw the anguish of his soul," etc.

Yea, would you know how God punishes this sin? Then observe the sinner convicted of sin by the Spirit of God, seeing and accusing himself as a liar and slanderer, and as a deceiver before God. See him tremble as he stands condemned by both his conscience and the law. Hear him sigh and groan as he sees God demanding His just due, while he has not a penny with which to pay. Yea, see him seeking and working to find truth within him, to improve himself; hear him complain that he finds in himself only deceit, lies and unrighteousness. Thus he becomes hopeless and looks for comforters, but finds none. He pleads for grace, but must acknowledge that he has forfeited grace, yea, that he deserves to suffer the severe wrath of God.

Such a soul agrees that it is impossible to judge too harshly of the sin of lying, or of the punishment with which God visits that sin.

If you are still not convinced of the severity of God's great anger, see that anger presented objectively in the suffering Savior and Mediator.

Oh, indeed, it was the Fathers' good pleasure to take to heaven and to press to His heart sinners who, by their sin and falling away from God, had blasphemed Him and had made Him, the God of truth, a liar.

But God could not overlook that sin; His righteousness and truth had to be exalted; another had to satisfy God's avenging justice for them and in their stead; in short, Christ, their Redeemer and Mediator had to stand in their place and be apprehended, accused, condemned and put to death as a blasphemer.

And now see our dear Lord Jesus as He walked upon this earth. Everywhere He walks

in perfect innocence and holiness, never did deceit or lies pass over His lips. Always His mouth overflowed with truth. Yet He was always abused and slandered. They called Him everything mean, they even called Him Beelzebub, the prince of devils. And although God's Holy Child Jesus never blasphemed, He was taken and sentenced to death as a blasphemer. You hear it in the hall of Caiaphas, "Now ye have heard his blasphemy," says that high priest, "What think ye?" "He is guilty of death," say the judges. And you hear it again before Pilate, "Crucify him, crucify him, because he made himself the Son of God!"

And Jesus? He held His peace. Was He then conscious of guilt? To that question I must answer no and yes. Jesus was perfectly conscious of His own innocence. But He also knew that all the lying and slandering and blaspheming of that innumerable multitude of His people was laid to His charge. Oh, dear people of God, matters stood thus: Jesus had to hold His peace, He had to permit Himself to be hanged as a slanderer and liar upon the cursed cross and die as a blasphemer, or, you and I must be condemned eternally as liars and blasphemers. But our dear Jesus did not want the latter, so He freely chose the former. Therefore He kept silence, permitted Himself to be condemned and crucified, and in the midst of taunting blasphemers He willingly gave up the ghost.

Now see Jesus, dripping with blood, hanging on the cross of Calvary as a maimed corpse, a spectacle for angels and men. And that is our work. That is the fruit of our lying and blaspheming, but it is also the fruit of the Father's good pleasure and of the Son's marvelous grace which in this manner cast away the guilt of His people into the sea of eternal forgetfulness.

Come let us sing, with an eye upon the slain Lamb of God: Psalter No.231 st. 1 and 3.

Dear Hearers!

May I ask you: What is your status in regard to the ninth commandment? Do you too belong to those who occupy themselves with lying and slandering?

Oh, I know, we are all guilty, terribly guilty in this matter. As I said before, we are born as liars and slanderers and therefore we commit that sin. But there is still a difference in sinning. If you belong to those who make their work of that sin, then in the name of the Lord I admonish you to desist, and to refrain from that devilish work. Have you not sown enough misery, quarrels and divisions with your lying and slander? Remember, God will require it. He will reprove you and set your sins in order before your eyes. We have already sketched for you what the portion of the slanderer is, both in this life and in the life hereafter.

You can not set right what your slandering has perverted. I am thinking of a minister whose life had been embittered by lies and slander. But when that man lay on his deathbed, the slanderers became so alarmed that they came with words of regret and asked him how they could make amends. Without many words he gave his slanderers a pillow and said, "Take this pillow and standing upon the tower, shake the feathers out of

it. Then pick up the feathers again, put them in the pillow and place it under my head. Then you will have made amends for your evil conduct.”

“But, sir,” they said, “we shall not be able to do that! The wind shall scatter the feathers everywhere. We shall not be able to gather half of them.”

“Thus,” said the dying servant of God, “you cannot make amends, for your slander has also spread far and near. Ask forgiveness of God, seek reconciliation with the Father, in the atonement of the Son, by the work of the Holy Spirit.”

That is the advice I give to all my fellow sinners with the sincere wish that the Lord grant you grace and power from above to follow that advice!

Are you slandered?

People of God, you cannot stop it, any more than you can prevent it. Endure it quietly. Do not requite slander with abuse, but commit yourself to Him Who knows you better, judges you more righteously and treats you more gently than anyone else.

And, oh, that everyone of us may receive grace, so that as the Instructor says, we may “in judgment and other dealings love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it.” Through the common grace of God there still is among men some sense of truth. Man has become an image-bearer of Satan, and often does the work of Satan but has not become a total lie as Satan has. But loving the truth for God's sake, because God is a God of truth, that can be done only by special grace. For that we need regeneration. The upright desire to be true, everywhere and always. But we need not therefore say everything we know. Matthew, Mark and Luke did write that one of the disciples cut off the ear of Malchus, but they did not put their dear brother in prison. Only John wrote who had done it, but then they could not harm him anymore, for then Peter was in heaven. Nevertheless, the Lord says, “Everyone that is of the truth heareth My voice,” and Peter says, “Charity shall cover the multitude of sins.”

If we may experience the renewal of our heart, then we shall also strive by grace “to defend and promote, as much as we are able, the honor and good character of our neighbor.”

We have shown you before that our good name is very important in this life. And now it is our duty to promote the honor and good character of our neighbor. Consider what grief it causes you when men attack your honor and good character. Then do not sin thus against your neighbor, lest he grieve because of you.

Truly here we must pray, “O let Thy Spirit be my constant aid, that all my ways may ever be directed to keep Thy statutes.” Else we would rather sacrifice the honor of our neighbor, yea of God Himself to our supposed honor and good name. Without that Spirit we cannot rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him, when He permits the slanderer to grieve us for awhile. But, people of God, if you would see peace and good days, keep

your lips from speaking guile and —

“Love the truth and peace.”

**Amen.**

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