

2120 Week 11: The Restoration of Broken Humanity

First Considerations

The prevailing human assumption will be that although we do not know how to repair our own brokenness, we are nevertheless aware of what it is. That is, I am in the best place to know what is good for my life. (Philosophers call this “privileged access”.)

This is a non – Christian assumption. Firstly, God is the creator, so he alone knows who we essentially are in his image. We need to be told what it means to be truly human, “you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Ps 139:13 -14). Secondly, sin brings self deception, “you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind),” (1Ki 8:39); “that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb 3:13).

It follows that we can only understand what the brokenness and restoration of humanity means in the light of the work of Christ. Jesus is the only one who has personally endured with a clear conscience and pure spirit the ravages that sin brings, pre – eminently, separation from all the love, joy, peace, goodness, wisdom etc. of God (Mark 15:34; Rom 6:6; 2 Cor 5:21; Gal 3:13 etc.). He is also the fully restored human being, resurrected into glory (John 17:5; Rom 6:4; Phil 3:21; 1 Pet 1:21 etc.). “The Restoration of Broken Humanity” can only refer to the transformation that has occurred in the person of Christ.

The True Nature of Repentance

A. False Views of Repentance

- a. repentance is something we can do in our own strength – scripture teaches repentance is a gift (Acts 5:31; 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25.)
- b. repentance is limited to conversion – Christians are commanded to repent (2 Cor 7:9; 12:21; Rev 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19)
- c. repentance is optional – see the texts above
- d. repentance is solely a matter of conforming to God’s law – while “sin is lawlessness” (1 John 3:4), the scripture teaches it is a personal response to God (Acts 20:21)
- e. repentance is primarily an emotional response – this is to confuse repentance with remorse, the primary element in repentance is a change of mind (Greek = *metanoia* Mark 1:15; Acts 2:38; Rev 2:5 etc.)
- f. repentance is exclusively personal – both Israel and churches are commanded to repent (1 Ki 8:47; Ps 78:34; Jer 5:3; Eek 14:6; 18:30; Zech 1:6; 2 Cor 7:9; Rev 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19)

g. repentance keeps us in grace – this is to make repentance a work (Heb 9:14). See Appendix 1. REPENTANCE

B: True Repentance

“I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us. For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” (2 Cor 7:9- 10)

- a. the impact of sin upon God can be described in ways that are analogies to human repentance e.g. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6 And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.” (Gen 6:5 - 6)
- b. sin causes God pain in his heart, that is, in the central determining aspect of his being
- c. this causes God to will an action in a manner that judges sin, so as to destroy it e.g. the flood of Noah, the rejection of Saul (1 Sam 15:35)
- d. the *result* of God’s action in judging sin is his satisfaction/pleasure (Rom 3:25; 1 John 2:2; 4:10)
- e. this encompasses the essential elements of repentance that we find in the case of humans
 1. Sorrow / contrition for sin (Joel 2:12-13; Acts 8:22; 2 Cor 7:10).
 2. Confession of sin (Luke 19:9; Ps 51:1ff)
 3. Turning from sin to an opposite attitude/action
 4. Restitution (Luke 19:1-9; Luke 3:8; Acts 26:20).
- f. all this is fully revealed in Christ as the manifestation of the grief sin cause God and his turning against it in judgement to make atonement/satisfaction (Mark 15:34)
- g. if “the gospel... is the power of God for salvation” (Rom 1:16), then repentance must be a fruit of the gospel
- h. theologians distinguish between 2 types of repentance
 1. legal repentance: Sorrow over personal moral failure to keep a set of rules. It may be self-interested regret or genuine distress over hurt caused to others of self.
 2. evangelical repentance: The gospel (evangel) pronouncement of forgiveness as a free and unconditional gift of a gracious, merciful, loving and holy God draws out repentance. ‘God’s kindness lead you to repentance.’ (Rom 2:4) ‘If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?’ ‘But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be feared.’ (Ps 130:3-4)

For a fuller discussion of these concepts see Appendix 2.

i. the scope of repentance incorporates

1. Idolatry - dependence on false gods (see earlier notes on false images of God)
2. Personal evil (see the classic vice lists in scripture e.g. Rom 13:12- 13; Gal 5:19- 21; Col 3:5).
3. Social evil - oppression, injustice.

It should be noted that this corresponds to the scope of revival.

What Holds Back Repentance?

- a. the immediate answer to this is the hardness of the human heart e.g. "Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed." (Rom 2:4- 5) Cf. Ex 7:13; 2 Chron 36:13; Ps 95:8; Dan 5:20; Zech 7:12; Mark 3:5; Eph 4:18; Heb 3:8, 15; 4:7
- b. from the beginning however, hardness of heart is a result of believing in the lies of the devil concerning the character of God i.e. God is a liar who cannot be trusted (Gen 3)
- c. this is particularly related to disbelief in the justice of God, wherever God is believed to be hard/merciless etc., genuine repentance is impossible
- d. human beings cannot open their hearts (Acts 16:14) to a God whose judgement is thought to be essentially destructive of life
- e. what is needed is a revelation that God's judgement, enacted in the cross, destroys that human evil which destroys the true life of man (Deut 4:24; 9:3; Isa 33:14; Heb 12:29)

Some Notes for the Counsellor

- a. are my own views of repentance biblical or legalistic?
- b. am I practicing repentance in my own life?
- c. do I fear giving offence/experiencing rejection if I raise issues that call for repentance
- d. See Appendix 3. The Importance of Repentance

Appendix 1 : REPENTANCE

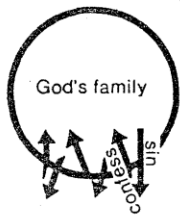
10 - Will we always be repenting?

The answer to this is, of course, "yes". However, we need to distinguish something. It is that there is a decisively new place for the person who is, as Paul would say it, "in Christ".

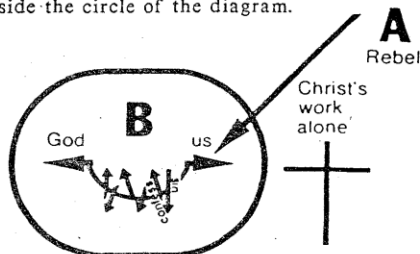
For, it is one thing to repent from a position of being a rebel outside the Kingdom of God. This initial conversion or "turning around" has to do with the acceptance of what it is that Christ has performed on our behalf. It will deal with the wrath of God which we were rightly under.

However, once we have moved into the family of God, we are in a relation with God which He says is justified, and having the righteousness of Jesus as a gift, we are OK in his sight. However, we need to maintain our new relationship by coming often before God and clearing our sin which has taken place. For this reason we need to hear clearly the following quotation from the preamble which I wrote to the confessing of sins in 1980. It deals in a diagrammatic form of the place of the justified sinner.

For others, a similar "security-problem," arising from sins committed, causes them to believe that they are outside the faith (which is not true), or that they are not "in a state of grace" (which is not to believe God's promise that they are). What is needed, they say, is an act of confession and the doing of penance to be brought back again into a "state of grace." Consequently, they live on the neurotic line of being out - confess - back in; sin - out - confess - back in. This ends in despair.



This is to confuse *basis* with *performance*. Rather, the diagram for a justified sinner (below) directs us to the relationship between God and ourselves, deep inside the circle of the diagram.



It is at B (God -- us), inside the circle, that the dynamics of confession and forgiveness takes place. Our basic relation of *being* in the family has to do with Christ's finished work. Our style of relating goes up and down, yet within the family, God's promise for us is that "if we confess our sins,

Appendix 2. Repentance follows the Revelation of Christ as Ascended King

1. The Common Understanding

In some quarters today it is common to hear that we are not experiencing revival because “we are not desperate enough”. I believe this is symptomatic of a major confusion between cause and effect. It is true that there is never a major spiritual awakening without deep repentance, but repentance is a fruit of the ministry of the Spirit and not a religious work that “moves the hand of God”. Repentance is in fact a gift (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim 2:25). It is a gift intimately connected with the exalted status of Jesus. “God exalted him (Jesus) at his right hand as Leader and Saviour that he might *give* repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.” (Acts 5:31). Repentance/forgiveness is a gift that flows in and out of the human heart as men and women believe in the content of the gospel. They repent *as* they obediently receive the truth that Jesus is exalted *for them*. The communication of Jesus’ vicarious and substitutionary life did not end on the cross but continues beyond the resurrection into his heavenly status.

2. The Old Testament Evidence for the Priority of Grace

That repentance is a fruit rather than a root of revival is taught in the Old Testament. A line of prophetic thought insists that repentance *follows* blessing. This is perhaps clearest in a passage deeply relevant to the Christian life. This is Ezekiel 36, which teaches the necessity of being “born again”. “A new heart *I will* give you, and a new spirit *I will* put within you; and *I will* remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (36:26). The emphatic “I will” dominates this chapter; God “will” sovereignly return the people to the land from exile (v.24), cleanse the land from idolatry (v.25), put his Spirit in the people (v.27), be their God (v.28), save them (v.29) and make them fruitful (v.30). Up to this point Israel does nothing.

The passage now takes a different direction. “*Then* you shall remember your evil ways, and your dealings that were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominable deeds.” (v.32). Repentance comes from within the new heart of Israel as it is enabled through its softened condition to realise the gracious character of God despite its natural hardness and idolatry.

This is not an isolated passage. Jeremiah 32:36- 41 and 33:6- 9 both speak of the sovereign action of God in returning the exiles to their homeland with a heart to fear and obey him which is *followed* by righteousness. Likewise, Isaiah 44:22: “I have swept away your transgressions like a cloud, and your sins like mist; return to me, for I have redeemed you.” Finally, Hosea 3:5 says, “Afterward the Israelites shall return and seek the LORD their God, and David their king; they shall come in awe to the LORD and to his goodness in the latter days.”

The language of these passages is essentially covenantal, the expressions “their God ... my people” (Jer 32:38; Ezek 36:28; Hos 3:5) show that the action described is characteristic of the nature of God’s relationship with Israel and not incidental. It is the very heart of God to bless into repentance.

3. The Blessing of Repentance in the New Testament

The structure of the New Testament opens this truth up fully. The restoration and blessing that God has brought for all humanity in Christ is the ground of the possibility of the call, gift and exercise of turning to him for salvation. If the sum of God's blessings can be encapsulated in forgiveness, this is a completed reality that is offered to men and women through Jesus (Luke 24:47). The eternal spiritual blessings of the Father bestowed in "in the heavenly places" in Christ (Eph 1:3) include "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). In other words, repentance flows from (heaven sent) forgiveness and not vice – versa. This order is evident in Peter's Pentecost sermon, which is a model for all subsequent preaching of the gospel.

Peter commences his address by referring to the immediate power and presence of God manifest in the "other languages" given to the assembled church to proclaim to the assembled multitude "God's deeds of power" (Acts 2:4 -15). He authenticates this strange phenomenon by interpreting it as a fulfilment of Joel 2:28- 32 where the Spirit is poured out on all flesh so that all prophesy (Acts 2:17- 21). He then moves on to recount the central facts of the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:22 – 32). To all of this the apostles were witnesses. Peter then proclaims the exaltation of Jesus to the right hand of God, his receiving the promise of the Spirit and pouring him out on the disciples so that the assembled multitude could "see and hear" the action of the heavenly Lord (Acts 2:33- 35). In other words, the things that the crowd had undeniably witnessed for themselves in the speech of the disciples, and Peter, was the testimony of the exalted Jesus to his own status through his spokespersons. They were there and then on earth testifying with spiritual authority to heavenly realities that they could only have been intimately acquainted with if they sharing in Jesus' heavenly position and power.

Their manifestation of the gift of the Spirit of the "last days" (Acts 2:17) was a visible witness that the end time blessings prophesied in the Old Testament had come upon Israel. Since this was *already* true, anyone who accepted Jesus as Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36) could receive the promise of the Spirit and forgiveness of sins (Acts 2:38b). Baptism and repentance (Acts 2:38a) do not cause the blessing but appropriate it on a personal level.

The basic pattern of the apostolic preaching is:

1. The distribution of a blessing.
2. The attributing of this to the exalted Christ.
3. A call to turn to God to receive this blessing in fullness.

Acts 3 is an especially clear example:

1. A lame man is healed unconditionally in the name of Jesus (3:1- 10) and "in the presence" of the assembled crowd (Acts 3:16).
2. This is attributed to the "glorified" Jesus who is in "the presence of the Lord (God)...in heaven" (Acts 3:13; 20- 21).

3. A call is made to “repent ...so that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord ...God...sent him (Jesus) first to you, to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.” (Acts 3:19, 20, 26).

What I have already argued appears in summary form in Acts 5:31 -32. The context is the trial of the apostles before the Sanhedrin because they have been ministering signs, wonders i.e. blessings, among the people in the name of Jesus (Acts 5:12- 16). The sequence in time, though not in the order of the text, is

1. The blessing *par excellence*, the Holy Spirit (see Galatians 3:14), is given to those who obey and believe in Jesus. The power of the apostolic witness through miracles is the evidence that this is the case (Acts 5:32).
2. This is due to the power of Jesus whom “God exalted to his right hand as Leader and Saviour.” (Acts 5:31a), in order that:
3. “he might give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins.” (Acts 5:31b).

I will now move briefly to the structure of some of the epistles to support the principle argument that repentance flows from a revelation of blessing. In general, Paul’s letters start with an exposition of what God has done for us in Christ before moving on to a section containing ethical exhortations. Romans is the clearest example, though Ephesians and Colossians also portray this pattern.

1. Romans 1- 11 is a sustained argument concerning the faithfulness of God in justification (1 -5), sanctification (6- 8) and election (9 -11). All this is “blessings.”
2. The whole book is built on the foundation that Jesus has been “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,” (Rom 1:4). This is the theme of the exaltation of the Saviour.
3. Chapter 12 therefore begins with a statement of *consequence*. “I appeal to you therefore brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice...be transformed by the renewing of your minds...(12:1 -2). This is the element of repentance, based on the “mercies of God” outlined in the rest of the book so far.

What this brief foray into the New Testament letters helps us to see is that repentance follows blessing in the Christian life, and not just for the unbeliever. “It is the kindness of God that is meant to lead you to repentance...” (Rom 2:4).

Appendix 3. The Importance of Repentance

A Personal Example

The last couple of years of my life had been very difficult. Every Sunday service was marked by a sense of heaviness, labour and nausea. From counselling I knew where the problem came from. At 4-5 years of age I had regularly been physically cornered by my grandmother who hated me intensely and reduced me to art. emotional pulp by verbal harassment. It was clear to me that I must have defended myself in these situations by

emotional withdrawal and shutdown. This strategy, activated by any threatening circumstance (like preaching) was keeping God at a distance. Attempts to shake off the pattern were futile.

Then I went to visit another minister who I'd not seen for a year. As he put it there was a heaviness over my life, it was as if I wore a cloak over my emotions which I only threw off in moments of intense excitement. His question was not about my intention to repent. but as to whether I had got in touch with the original decision to protect myself emotionally. This offered new hope.

As my friend laid hands on me and we asked God for a connection with the childhood decision things moved quickly. Immediately I had a deep sense of feeling very small, as though I were a tiny boy. Then I was aware of turning in on myself trying to hide inside and if possible become non-existent. The words of the second century church Father Irenaeus came to me: 'The glory of God is a man fully alive'. I explicitly repented of turning inwards and asked God to help me turn inside out, especially that Jesus might be seen through my life. It was through thi repentance that God healed me of the oppression which had covered my life in such a damaging way.

Yet so often repentance seems marginalised or misunderstood. This was brought to my attention recently in two quite different ways which provoked this present article. Writing in the controversial book *Power Religion* David Powlinson tabulates the dominance of psychological over theological categories in the North American Christian counselling scene. Personality theory, psychopathology, health and therapeutic change have replaced biblical anthropology, sin, grace, holiness and sanctification. The problem here as I see it is not psychology p but the impossibility of translating biblical into extra-biblical categories.

Shortly after reading *Power Religion* I was confronted with an almost textbook illustration of the problem it highlighted. Robyn was a middle-aged woman who came to see me in deep distress because of a long history of marriage difficulties. She had a remarkable grasp of her situation due to considerable 'Christian counselling' in the past. When however I asked her if she had repented of her co-dependency there was a failure to understand the impact of the question. Her past experience of counselling had simply led her to try to replace one set of beliefs and practices with another. She was trying hard and exhausted by this procedure. This had not been helpful. It was a considerable relief to her once I explained how to outwork her responsibility before God in terms of repentance.

Powlinson's observations and Robyn's case point to the unique role of repentance in truly Christian counselling. In traditional theological terms men and women live first and foremost *coram Deo* (before God) and then *coram hominibus* (before humans). In the words of the apostle Paul men and women must 'turn to God in repentance' (Acts 20:21 MV). This awareness of responsibility before God constitutes repentance to be what it is.

Legal and Evangelical Repentance

The older theologians distinguished 'legal' from 'evangelical' repentance. In the case of 'legal' repentance a person experiences sorrow over personal moral failure to keep a set of rules. It may be self-interested regret or genuine distress over the hurt caused others.

This of itself does not constitute repentance, even if the individual confesses the matter as sin in prayer. To recognise sin nominally is not to be aware of sin as sin. As James Denney put it, there must be a revelation of what God is in relation to sin.¹⁴¹ Or, in biblical language ‘knowledge of sin’ (Romans 3: 20 KJV). Against its Hebrew background knowledge means more than intellectual persuasion, it implies a deep inward and intellectual awareness. The ‘knowledge of sin’ is a sense of moral guilt in the presence of God.

From this knowledge the power of repentance issues. As David Ames puts it: ‘true moral guilt is an agent of God to draw us back to himself. What makes repentance so potent is not the awareness of separation from God alone but the availability of mercy. It is the presence of mercy offered in the form of unconditional forgiveness which evokes (draws out) repentance from a person. This is what makes true repentance ‘evangelical’, that is, rooted in the gospel (evangel) offer of forgiveness. As Paul says: ‘God’s kindness leads you to repentance’ (Romans 2: 4 MV). There is no place, especially in the intimate situation of counselling, for haranguing people to repent or encouraging them to strive to attain proper repentance. Repentance is not so much something which you do as something which happens to you. As long as repentance is seen as a condition for forgiveness it cannot be ‘evangelical’ only ‘legal’. Repentance is a gift (Acts 5: 31, 11: 18; 2 Timothy 2: 25).

An Illustration

An excellent illustration of ‘evangelical repentance’ is found in Dr White’s *The Masks of Melancholy*

‘As he talked about earlier years in his life, two things seemed to bother him. He had drunk a bottle of beer several years before when his doctor had told him not to. More significantly, he had avoided enlisting in World War 2, and felt bad that some of his friends had died in Europe. Curiously he felt equally bad about both his “sins”... “What about forgiveness?” I asked him.

“I want it so bad.”

“What’s your religion?”

“Russian Orthodox.”

“And what does your priest say about how you get to be forgiven?”

“He doesn’t talk much. We go to confession.”

“And what does that do?”

“I don’t often go.”

I groped for words. “But if you do go, why would God forgive you?” “Because Christ died. He shed blood.”

“So?”

“But I’m too bad for that.”

Unaccountably I grew angry. No logical reason. It just happened. ‘What d’you mean you’re too bad?’

His voice was rising like my own. “I don’t deserve ever to be forgiven.” “You’re darn right you don’t!”

He looked up at me surprised. “I can’t be a hypocrite. I gotta make amends.” It may be hard to believe but I found my anger increasing. “And who d’you think you are to say

Christ's death was not enough for you? Who are you to feel you must add your miserable pittance to the great gift God offers you? Is his sacrifice not good enough for the likes of you?"

We continued to stare at each other, and suddenly he began both to cry and to pray at once. I wish I could remember his exact words. As nearly as I can recall he said something like this: "God, I didn't know. I'm real sorry. I didn't mean to offend you. God, thank you... It's amazing... I didn't know it worked like that... I thought... but, God, I didn't know much... Gee, God, I don't know how to say it. Thank you. Thanks an awful lot. Gee, God, thank you."

Repentance is a Work of God

Since repentance involves a revelation of the unconditional grace of God and is God's gift it depends upon the work of the Holy Spirit. John White usefully summarises much of what I have said so far: 'When people ask me what repentance is I have to talk about the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit so awakens the understanding of a human being that he/she perceives personal sin and the love of God represented in Calvary in a new way. Repentance takes place, not because we decide to repent, but because the Holy Spirit moves in and so illuminates us that we really understand for the first time. The inadequacy of purely psychological categories becomes important at this point. In psychological terms repentance can be represented only as an attitudinal or volitional change. The scripture however speaks of: 'the thoughts and intentions of the heart' (Hebrews 4: 12 RSV). In biblical anthropology the heart is the governing centre of the whole person: 'Above all else, guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life' (Proverbs 4: 23 NIV). Psychological states, whether understood in terms of mind, will or emotion do not exist as self-contained phenomenon but are governed in their operation from the primary faculty of the heart. [

Theologically interpreted, what is happening when a human being repents is not a simple intra-psychological event. Rather, God 'opens the heart' (Acts 16: 14 NIV) so that 'the eyes of the heart are enlightened' (Ephesians 1: 18 NW). This illumination of the heart with respect to sin and mercy before Q evokes a change of heart. Since it is a change of heart it affects the total disposition of the person. There is fresh intellectual comprehension, emotional contrition and volitional change. In order to emphasise the holistic nature of repentance, a totality that can only be produced by the grace of God, it is probably better to think of repentance as a 'change of heart' rather than a 'change of mind'.

Repentance and Counselling

In terms of the history of counselling these matters were well understood by the Puritans, who had a sophisticated diagnostic system. The eighteenth century American theologian and revivalist Jonathon Edwards seems to be the end of an era. After Edwards evangelicalism became pietistic - focussed on emotions, rationalistic - obsessed with propositions, or voluntaristic - the answer to personal problems was to try harder. This fragmentary approach to human persons and their deepest problems necessarily failed to provide solutions in the personal context.

The modern counselling movement in the Christian Church can be interpreted as an attempt to meet genuine needs via psychological methods but usually without an adequate theological basis. It is to be expected that many of its results are transitory. John White is right to say: 'unless the moral aspects of the problem, which include the response of the person doing the remembering, are faced, the experience is unlikely to lead to permanent change'. For it is only when men and women know themselves *coram Deo* - created in His image, sinners, redeemed by grace, can there be the possibility of change at the deepest possible level - that of the heart.

Why is repentance so important? Simply because in truly repenting we are dealing not merely with other human beings and our own troubled conscience but with God. With the living God who is our Creator, Redeemer and Judge. The God whose image is our destiny. If as counsellors we do not cooperate with God in bringing men and women to evangelical repentance then we must question in what sense our counselling is authentically Christian.

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- John Yates studied science and worked as a high school teacher for a number of years. After training for the Anglican ministry and serving curacies in Victoria, Australia, he completed a PhD in the philosophy of religion. Presently he is the rector of an Anglican church in Perth, Western Australia, where his work includes counselling.

10 - Will we always be repenting?

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A

Rebel

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