

## CREATION TO CORRUPTION

### Chapter Theme

God's perfect design for men and women, which He established at creation, includes their functional differences. All of this became corrupted by sin and Satan. Although through Christ men and women can live according to God's design, Satan tries to corrupt Christ's work both in marriage and in the church.

### Icebreakers

- List several ways in which you have personally seen the influence of the feminist movement in your church.

How has it altered the biblical pattern for men's and women's roles?

- The first sin details the reversal of male-female roles. If you are a woman, relate an incident where you usurped a man's leadership position. If you are a man, describe a time when you allowed a woman to usurp a specific leadership role you held. What were the consequences?

### Group Discovery Questions

1. What kind of damage has the feminist movement caused for both society and the church?
2. In what ways did Adam and Eve have a perfect relationship before sin entered the world?
3. Describe the specific sins Adam and Eve committed at the fall.
4. In what ways does the curse affect the most basic elements of life?
5. What part of society does Satan specifically attack? Why?
6. In what ways does Gnosticism convolute the biblical creation account?
7. What is the goal of New Age theology?

## Personal Application Questions

1. Christians today tend to compromise biblical teaching and standards. Under pressure from the feminist movement, some Christians have reinterpreted the Bible's teaching on the role of women. Others have reinterpreted the first few chapters of Genesis in a futile attempt to harmonize the biblical account of creation with the pseudoscience of evolution. Some insist that the Bible doesn't teach all the principles necessary to address life's problems. The faith "once for all handed down to the saints" (Jude v. 3) has too often become like a weather vane—shifting with each passing wind of change. What is the ultimate source of authority in your life? When faced with a conflict between biblical teaching and a contemporary idea, what do you do? Do you reinterpret the Bible or reject the idea? Are you willing to take a stand for God's Word? Study Psalm 19:7–11 to see how God describes His Word, and determine to uphold it.
2. Read Matthew 4:1–11. How did Jesus respond when Satan tempted Him? Based on Jesus' pattern, what should Eve have done when Satan tempted her? How do you deal with temptation? Do you follow Eve's or Jesus' pattern? The most effective way to deal with any temptation is to respond biblically. But that presupposes you know what God's Word teaches. Thus it is imperative that you saturate your mind with God's Word so you can resist temptation.

## Focus on Prayer

Ask God to open your mind to the instruction from His Word that is contained in this book. As you study through the remaining chapters, ask God to reinforce truth you already know and to confirm in your heart truth you were unaware of until now. Ask Him to give you opportunities to apply them.

## Assignment

Make a list of those people who exercise some type of authority over you. They may be family members, business associates, or even people you've never met. Then make a list of those people over whom you exercise some type of authority. Next to each name on those lists, write one word that describes the ease or difficulty of the relationship. In other words, does your authority or submission come easily or with moderate difficulty, or is it simply impossible?

## THE CASE FOR AUTHORITY AND SUBMISSION

### Chapter Theme

One of the many questions the apostle Paul faced from the Corinthian church was on the matter of the submission of women. First Corinthians 11:3–16 is Paul’s clear statement on the biblical principle of authority and submission.

### Icebreakers

- What are some ways women manifest independence in our culture? What are some ways men abuse their positions of authority, specifically with regard to

women? How much independence for women do you think is justified? Please explain your reasoning.

- The apostle Paul cited a culturally relevant example to help explain the principle of authority and submission. If he were alive today and looked to our culture for an example, what might he choose? How would he use that example to teach the principle of authority and submission?

### Group Discovery Questions

1. What were conditions like for women in the culture of Paul's day? Why did feminism gain in popularity?
2. Explain the principle of submission. How is it manifested in society?
3. How have evangelical feminists attempted to redefine the meaning of "head" in 1 Corinthians 11:3?
4. Why is a clear understanding of Galatians 3:28 vital to any discussion of the principle of authority and submission? What does that passage teach about men and women?
5. In what way did Christianity elevate women to a position they had not known previously?

6. What are the three manifestations of authority and submission as described by Paul (1 Cor. 11:3)?
7. When and where is it appropriate for women to pray or proclaim God's Word?
8. In the Corinthian church, what was a wife communicating by wearing a head covering? What was a woman revealing by her failure to wear a head covering?
9. In what ways are men and women equal? In what ways are they different?
10. In what ways does nature testify to the differences between men and women?

## Personal Application Questions

1. When we examine the principle of authority and submission, it is easy for us to focus only on our human relationships and forget our relationship to Christ. We can't allow Paul's statement that "Christ is the head of every man" to go unnoticed. Since all authority has been given to Jesus in heaven and on earth, what should be your response to His Word? Do you obey all His commands or only those you find coincide with your desires? Remember, Christ is your Lord, and He requires complete obedience.

2. How do you respond to people in authority over you who know less than you in their particular sphere of influence? Do you follow their leadership willingly, or do you chafe under their authority? Based on what you've learned, what must be your proper response and why?

### Focus on Prayer

If you are currently having trouble submitting to someone in authority over you, confess it to God. Ask Him to show you ways in which you can be positive and encouraging to the individual in question. Begin to pray for him or her by realizing that responsibility carries its own burdens.

### Assignment

For the next week make a list of the various ways marriages are portrayed in our society through advertising, media, or personal experience. Note how many biblical commands or patterns each one violates. Which one comes the closest to God's ideal and why?

# 3

## MARRIAGE AS IT WAS MEANT TO BE

### Chapter Theme

In spite of the curse on marriage because of the fall, men and women can experience fulfilled marriages in Christ by following the biblical pattern and the example of Christ's love for the church.

### Icebreakers

- In what ways do you think marriage has changed in the last twenty to thirty years? How do you think society's view of marriage has influenced the outworking of a typical Christian marriage today?

- How would you characterize the perfect marriage? What should the husband contribute? What should the wife contribute? Even with their contributions, what must be present before the marriage can ever be complete?

### Group Discovery Questions

1. Catalog the different ways the current American family has failed. According to Paul, what contributes to the demise of the family?
2. What is necessary before God's design for marriage will ever be a success?
3. What should characterize a wife's submission to her husband? What should characterize a husband's treatment of his wife?
4. To whom are we really submitting when we submit to those in authority over us?
5. To whom should a husband look when he wants to know how he should treat his wife?
6. What advantage do Christian men have in their love for their wives that unbelieving men don't have?
7. In what ways is God's love different from the world's concept of love?

8. What ought to be the goal of a husband's love for his wife?
9. How should husbands care for their wives?
10. What are some barriers to successful marriages?

### Personal Application Questions

1. What is shaping your expectations for marriage: the world's fantasies or God's realities? Sit down with your spouse or fiancé and list the expectations that each of you has for the other. Next, determine which of those have a biblical foundation. In that way you can resolve potential conflicts before they start. Focus on what you can give to your partner rather than what you can get. By doing so, you will help to prevent any expectations from not being met.
2. Men, if you love a woman, you should do everything in your power to preserve her purity. Do you ever encourage her to compromise her spiritual or moral standards? What are you doing to draw her closer to God and to make her life more virtuous? Recognizing your natural concern for your own body and the fact that it is the temple of the Holy Spirit, make sure you care for your wife with at least the same amount of zeal.

## Focus on Prayer

With the pressures of the world as great as they are, Christian couples must make Christ the focus of their relationship. As a couple, make sure you both set aside time together each day to go before the Lord, praying for each other's needs, spiritual as well as physical and emotional. Even when you're not together, make sure you pray for your spouse and for the concerns of that day. You'll find that your relationship will grow deeper and stronger as a result.

## Assignment

What are the spiritual, physical, and economic priorities of your family? If you had to eliminate one or more pursuits, what would they be? How much of what you do has a biblical focus? Is anything you are doing clearly forbidden by God's Word? Over the next week, think through each of these issues, asking God to give you wisdom regarding any tough decisions you need to make.

# 4

## THE EXCELLENT WIFE AT WORK

### Chapter Theme

In spite of what society claims, the Bible clearly states that women are to be “workers at home” so they can fulfill God’s design for them and their families.

### Icebreakers

- If you are a worker at home, how would you answer those who claim you are hindering your potential by not pursuing a career or some job outside the home?

- Economic hardship faces many Christian couples who are committed to the biblical pattern for the family. What are some avenues you might pursue that could bring in extra income yet allow the wife to be a “worker at home”?

### Group Discovery Questions

1. What events helped create an environment in the United States conducive to the growth of the traditional family?
2. What factors led to the fall of the traditional family of the '50s?
3. What was expected of wives in the first century?
4. Explain why a woman's responsibility is the home.
5. Name some of the problems families face when the wife goes to work outside the home.
6. What ought to be the overriding concern in any plans for the wife to work outside the home?
7. What characteristics should men look for in a wife?
8. Describe the selfless love of the Proverbs 31 woman for her husband.

9. What types of business abilities must a wife combine if she desires to pattern her life after the Proverbs 31 woman?
10. What activities of the Proverbs 31 woman reveal her motivation and self-discipline?
11. What was the legacy of the Proverbs 31 woman?

### Personal Application Questions

1. If you are a mother who works outside the home, analyze why you are working. By the time you deduct taxes, child care costs, clothing, and transportation expenses, how much extra income are you actually providing? Set aside time with your husband to honestly evaluate your present circumstances. Are there some sacrifices you both could make or some other means by which you could remain at home yet contribute to the financial needs of your family?
2. If you are a mother who is staying at home with your children, are you taking advantage of your opportunity to shape their lives for godly living? Or is your time spent unproductively with television programs that might be tearing down the very principles you are trying to instill into your family's life? Make sure every day has spiritual input so your children begin looking at life from God's

perspective. Prepare them for society's secular influence by teaching godly values (Prov. 22:6; 2 Tim. 3:15).

### Focus on Prayer

Anything you decide to do regarding your family's financial picture ought to be bathed in prayer. Ask God to clarify in your heart the wisdom from His Word regarding this topic. Allow Him to guide you in these vital decisions. But be sure you are willing to make sacrifices if He leads you in that direction.

### Assignment

Meditate as a family on Colossians 3:12–21, using those verses as a guideline for a devotional time together. Determine which qualities mentioned in the passage are lacking or weak in your family. Confess to one another the wrong attitudes and actions each has been exhibiting. After you choose an area you need to concentrate on, pray for one another that each may be strengthened to live the quality of life that glorifies Christ.

## A DIFFERENT PLACE IN GOD'S PLAN

### Chapter Theme

God's ideal for marriage is foreign to many people in the church. But God has left us with encouragement and instruction from His Word.

### Icebreakers

- Christians who are married to unbelievers face a difficult life that few of us can relate to. If you are married to an unbeliever, how do you live out your faith? If you know someone who is in that situation, what do you do to offer encouragement?

- Widows, divorcees, and single people are often ignored in many churches. If you are one of that number, how do you handle that kind of treatment? Do you secretly wish you had a different marital status? Why?

### Group Discovery Questions

1. What does Paul counsel a Christian not to do if he or she is married to an unbeliever?
2. How can a believer sanctify a home?
3. What are some things that a Christian wife can do that could help lead her unbelieving husband to Christ?
4. What are some things that a Christian husband can do that could lead his unbelieving wife to embrace Christ?
5. Who would qualify as a widow in the biblical sense?
6. How can the church decide which widows should receive financial support?
7. Who has the primary responsibility for caring for widows?
8. What qualities ought to characterize those widows who wish to serve the church in an official capacity?
9. How should the church encourage younger widows?

10. Describe the gift of singleness as Paul explained it.
11. What can single people do to control their desires if they do not have the gift of singleness?
12. What are some of the advantages of being single?

### Personal Application Questions

1. The wife is to be submissive, faithful, and modest toward her husband; and the husband is to show consideration, chivalry, and companionship toward his wife. Answer the following practical questions as a way of measuring those virtues in your life:
  - Are you faithful to maintain your spiritual life through Bible study, prayer, regular church attendance, and fellowship with God's people?
  - Do you ask forgiveness when you have done something wrong?
  - Do you accept corrective criticisms graciously?
  - Do you make excessive demands on your mate, expecting too much from him or her?
  - Do you allow your spouse to make mistakes without condemning him or her?

- Do you focus on what you appreciate about your mate, or do you tend to find fault with him or her?
- When you disagree with your mate, do you seek biblical answers for the problem instead of blowing up emotionally or verbally attacking your mate?
- Are you a good listener when your mate tries to explain something?

If you've spotted some problems in your life, prayerfully seek to make the necessary corrections. To help you in your resolve, seek the counsel and accountability of a godly friend who is a fellow wife or husband.

2. Does your church have a ministry to widows? Is it fulfilling its biblical responsibility to care for the godly women in its midst who have no means of support? If not, would you be instrumental in praying with your pastor about such a ministry and helping to initiate it? As a preventative measure against the church being overburdened, consider having a financial planner or tax adviser give a seminar to your church members on how they can prepare for the premature death of a breadwinner and for their retirement years.
3. The apostle Paul was convinced that, because of conflict with the world system, single believers should seriously consider the possibility of remaining as they are. Are you presently struggling with your singleness? If you are,

would you seriously consider Paul's advice? Ask God to confirm in your heart whether He would rather you be single or married.

### Focus on Prayer

Prayerfully consider the verses below and allow God to give you an awareness of others' needs and an increasing desire to help them:

- Romans 13:8—"Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law."
- Galatians 5:14—"The whole Law is fulfilled in ... the statement, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"
- 1 John 3:11, 16–17—"For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another... We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?"

## Assignment

True religion involves visiting “widows in their distress” (James 1:27). Visiting speaks of caring for needy women and their children, and distress refers to anything that burdens or pressures the spirit. Practical deeds of love can help relieve their pressures and burdens. Helping them around the house or taking them with you on trips are simple but important ways to uplift them. Create a list of ways you can serve. Then begin to do the actions on your list.

## 6

# THE CHURCH'S LEADING MEN

### Chapter Theme

While women have unique opportunities for service in the church, God has specifically called men to provide the authority and leadership of the church.

### Icebreakers

- Suppose you went to a Bible study with both men and women and found that a woman regularly led the prayer time. How would you respond? What opinion could that lead you to form regarding the leadership of the Bible study?

- Have you ever had any disagreement with anyone in leadership in your church? If so, how did the leader respond to you? How was the disagreement ultimately resolved? What positive or negative impressions did that situation leave you with?

### Group Discovery Questions

1. Who has the unique responsibility of offering public prayer on behalf of the lost?
2. With what are we to offer our prayers?
3. Why is the character of a leader more important than his aptitude?
4. What is the fundamental, universal requirement of all God's leaders? Why is it so important?
5. Explain the phrase "husband of one wife." Why is this a significant qualification for a church leader?
6. Why is sobriety included in the list of qualifications for a church leader?
7. What are the criteria that set apart a man who is skilled in teaching God's Word?
8. How can the love of money corrupt a man's ministry?

9. Where should a church leader first demonstrate his spiritual leadership? Why?
10. Why does Paul warn against putting a new convert into a leadership position?
11. How should a church leader be viewed by the unbelieving community?

## Personal Application Questions

1. Church leadership is a sacred task requiring the highest level of spiritual credibility and maturity. Sadly, some people pursue it for the wrong reasons, such as money, job security, or prestige. If you are in a position of spiritual leadership, what are your motives? Read 1 Peter 5:2–4. What is the compelling motive for anyone to pursue leadership in God's house? Be sure to guard your motives carefully.
2. Credibility is the key to effective teaching; your life must model your lesson. That's true even if you aren't a preacher or teacher in the formal sense. We are all teaching something to those who watch us, and they often learn more from our actions than from our words. What are you teaching those who observe your life? Are they learning holiness or hypocrisy?

## Focus on Prayer

Cultivating a disciplined mind requires that you constantly expose it to what is good. What things do you meditate on? Should some of those things be eliminated? If so, ask God to help you be more disciplined in your thinking as you learn to focus on what is true, honorable, right, pure, lovely, of good repute, excellent, and worthy of praise.

## Assignment

Perhaps you've been wondering if you have been called into the ministry. If so, now is the time to honestly evaluate your life against the biblical qualifications. After you finish your evaluation, ask your pastor or other leaders in your church to evaluate you as well. They may confirm or question your readiness for such a role. Whatever their response, ask them to continue to encourage you, guide your training, and hold you accountable.

## GOD'S HIGH CALL FOR WOMEN

### Chapter Theme

Two passages in Scripture, 1 Timothy 2:11–15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–35, are the authoritative word on the limitations of women's roles in the church. They are not the apostle Paul's attempt to confine women to a second-class status; they are an affirmation of God's perfect design.

### Icebreakers

- How would you characterize the way you dress when you attend church: conservative, contemporary, liberal, or ostentatious? Would others characterize your

dress in the same way or differently? What kind of dress do you think honors God the most?

- If you are a woman, do you think God has blessed you with the gift of teaching or leadership? If so, how are you using those gifts? Does your teaching or leadership involve exercising authority over men in some ministry of the church? How do you reconcile that with 1 Timothy 2:11–15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–35?

## Group Discovery Questions

1. How do some people try to disprove the trustworthiness of 1 Timothy 2:9–15 and 1 Corinthians 14:33–35?
2. Why is the wearing of expensive, elaborate clothes and jewelry inappropriate for women in the church? What should they wear instead?
3. What ought to characterize a woman's approach to worship?
4. According to 1 Timothy 2:11, what role are women to have during the worship service? How did Paul's instruction differ from the accepted practice for those who came from a Jewish background?

5. According to the Old Testament, in what ways were women equal to men? What roles did they not share with men?
6. How does the New Testament support the teaching of the Old Testament regarding women's roles?
7. What one word best characterizes the role of a woman as a learner? Explain.
8. What exactly does Paul forbid women from doing in the context of the worship service or any ministry involving men?
9. What similar instruction did Paul give the Corinthians (1 Cor. 14:33–35)?
10. What are some appropriate circumstances when women can proclaim God's truth?
11. In what way does Paul use the circumstances that occurred at the fall to corroborate the differing roles for men and women that God established in the order of creation?
12. What is a woman's greatest opportunity for influencing society? Explain.
13. What are some ways women can use their spiritual gifts yet still fulfill the teaching of 1 Timothy 2:11–15?

## Personal Application Questions

1. What did Paul mean when he said that women were to keep silent in the church? Did this simply refer to the Corinthian women in the Corinthian church? Explain. How does this apply to the trend today of women in the pulpit? Should a woman who is mature spiritually and gifted in teaching take over the preaching in a church where there isn't a man available to do the job? How should women who are gifted in teaching exercise their gifts?
2. Some women in the Ephesian and Corinthian churches were more concerned with their rights than their responsibilities to God and the church. What about you? Is your focus on getting or giving? Do you more frequently demand your rights or fulfill your responsibilities? Remember that Jesus came not "to be served, but to serve" (Matt. 20:28). If your focus has gradually changed from ministering to the needs of others to looking out for your own rights, you can help get it back where it belongs by memorizing Philippians 2:3–4.

## Focus on Prayer

The church at Ephesus had been influenced by the prevailing views of society regarding women. The same could be said about the church today. In this, as in other areas, the church has been influenced by

the world instead of being an influence on the world. Are your views of current issues being shaped by the prevailing opinions of society or by God's Word? Perhaps you need to rethink your position on issues such as women's roles, abortion, homosexuality, creation and evolution, the Christian's responsibility to government, lawsuits, and divorce and remarriage. Spend some time in prayer and ask God to give you the courage to take a stand on the issues based on His Word—no matter what society propagates. Then pray that the church as a whole will also stand firm for God's truth.

### Assignment

Women can (under the right circumstances) proclaim God's truth. Do you regularly look for opportunities to share the truths of Scripture with your friends? Your neighbors? Your spouse? Your children? To share the truths of the Bible, we must first learn them ourselves. That requires constant study. If you aren't regularly studying Scripture, make a commitment to the Lord to begin tomorrow.

## THE CHARACTER OF SERVICE

### Chapter Theme

While not many men are cut out for leadership in the church, it is the duty of all believers to serve the body of Christ. They can do so in both official and unofficial ways. First Timothy 3:8–13 and Titus 2:1–8 delineate the characteristics that ought to exemplify all believers willing to serve.

### Icebreakers

- What thoughts and perceptions do you usually associate with the word *deacon*? Do you view a deacon more as a leader or as a servant? Why?

- What do you suppose is a good age to stop ministering to others? At what age should you begin serving others? What have you learned from older believers? What have you learned from younger Christians?

### Group Discovery Questions

1. What happens to the church when individual believers don't serve with the unique abilities God gave them?
2. What are the three levels of service the Bible delineates?
3. In what way do deacons specifically assist the elders?
4. What qualities ought to be true of a deacon's personal character? Explain each one.
5. Out of necessity, what is the foundation of a deacon's spiritual character?
6. What overarching quality that is to be true of elders must also characterize deacons? Why?
7. What factors indicate that Paul established a separate office for women deacons?
8. What rewards await those who serve well as deacons?
9. What characteristics and virtues should be manifested by older men in the church? In what way does their experience of years heighten those qualities?

10. What are older women in the church to be busy doing? Why is this such a vital ministry?
11. What are the older women to teach the younger women to do (Titus 2:4–5)? Explain each one.
12. What kind of dangers do young Christian men face in our society?
13. What godly qualities should young men cultivate?

### Personal Application Questions

1. Review the personal character qualifications of a deacon. How would you rate yourself in each of those areas? What kind of changes would you need to make to be known as righteous in those areas? Do some serious self-examination. As you do, realize that the outcome of your examination holds greater significance than merely the possibility of a future role as a deacon. It means you will have a greater capacity for glorifying God.
2. To what degree are you actively using your gifts in serving the church? If you are an older believer, are you investing your life in someone who can gain practical wisdom from your experience? If you are a younger believer, are you allowing yourself to be held accountable to someone older so that you can arm yourself against the temptations of youth?

## Focus on Prayer

Perhaps you've been unsure about whether you should pursue a ministry opportunity that has come your way. Or you may be looking for a ministry to serve in. If you haven't already, begin seeking God's guidance. Ask Him to clearly show you where you might serve. Sometimes the best place to start is where you know there are needs. You may find that, as you begin serving in needy places, you have found the very spot where God wants you.

## Assignment

According to Acts 6:3, the people were to look for men who were "of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom." Acts 6:5 mentions that Stephen was "full of faith." Those characteristics identified seven men of integrity. Can you be characterized as a person of integrity? On a scale of one to ten, how would you rate yourself in each of those four characteristics? In which one are you the weakest? Make it your goal this week to improve your Christian walk in that area. For example, if you are weakest in your faith, look up *faith* in a concordance and do a word study on that topic. Or you might make a list of all the times God has been faithful in blessing your life; in turn, that will increase your faith in Him.

## FOR THE SAKE OF THE KINGDOM

### Chapter Theme

Holy, righteous lives are the backbone of the gospel we proclaim. That's why it is critical that Christians live in such a way that will cause unbelievers to investigate the claims of Christianity.

### Icebreaker

What have you found to be your most effective means of evangelism? Do you find it easier to talk about Christ to someone you don't know or to a friend or relative? What do you think those unbelievers who are closest to you say about you when you're not around?

## Group Discovery Questions

1. Why does God want His people to live holy lives?
2. In what ways can we bring dishonor on God's Word?
3. Why don't unbelievers want to be confronted by people whose lives are transformed by Christ?
4. What ought to be our primary message to our world about God? Why?
5. Before unbelievers can be attracted to the gospel, what must they come to realize about their own lives?
6. What are we ultimately doing if we allow Satan a free rein to push his feminist agenda within the church?

## Practical Application Question

Before Jesus ascended into heaven, He commanded His disciples to "Go ... make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. 28:19). In so doing, He established evangelism as the number-one priority for the church. But many Christians act as if the responsibility for evangelism belongs to the pastor or the church evangelism committee. What about you? Are you concerned about the lost? When was the last time you spoke to an unbeliever about Christ? Are you currently praying for someone's salvation? Cultivate relationships with unbelievers, and take every opportunity to speak to them about the Lord.

## Focus on Prayer

If evangelism has been difficult for you, ask God to give you a love for the lost. If you aren't already doing so, begin praying for someone's salvation. Ask God to give you opportunities to present the gospel. And ask Him to help you lead the kind of life that will make unbelievers curious about Christ.

## Assignment

The goal of this book has been to give you a clearer picture of God's will, both generally and specifically, for your life. What new insights have you gained? What new truths have you learned? You now need to begin to apply those to your life. Also, when you have the opportunity, be sure you uphold God's Word in the midst of the perverse society in which we live.

## NOTES

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