The Life & Joy of God's People

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[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast, a podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. Turn with me this morning, if you would, to 1 Peter chapter 4.

Just a couple of weeks ago, we finished a lengthy study through the Gospel of Mark. And I want to give you a little bit of a roadmap of where we're going the next few weeks and then down the road as well.
On Sunday evenings, we start our evening service back tonight, by the way, at 5 o'clock. We hope that you'll come and be a part of that. On Sunday evenings, we're studying through 1 Thessalonians.
We're in chapter 5 this evening. We've got four or five messages left from 1 Thessalonians. And so what we're going to do, while we're finishing 1 Thessalonians on Sunday evenings, we're going to take the next several Sunday mornings and just look at a few different texts.
Now, we're going to spend a couple of weeks here in 1 Peter 4. Then we're going to go and spend a couple of weeks in an Old Testament passage. And then we finish 1 Thessalonians on Sunday evenings.
[1:20] We're going to switch on Sunday mornings then. We're going to pick up and study verse by verse through 2 Thessalonians. But that's going to give us just a few weeks here on Sunday mornings to look at a few different passages.

I wanted to look at some things that I thought would be helpful for us as a congregation, both to consider where we are today, the opportunities in front of us, the challenges in front of us, as well as, with it being the early days of a new year, some things that would hopefully serve to clarify our thinking and our direction as a congregation.
Several months ago, maybe four months ago or so, our church hosted the G3 conference. And I had the opportunity to be one of the preachers of that conference. And I preached from this text here in 1 Peter 4.
And while I preached it there for that group, a part of that conference that we hosted here, I've not preached this text here for you. And so what I wanted to do is take what I did at that conference, expand it, build upon it, and teach it for a couple of weeks, a little more time than I had at the conference back in the fall, and hopefully apply it very specifically to where we are as a church and how the Lord, I pray, can use this in our own hearts.
Issues like, what kind of church should we be? What are the things that we must do?
[2:57] How should we as a church be known? It always is striking to me when you attend a graduation ceremony, and they call out a graduate's name, and you have just maybe a second, maybe two seconds, maybe three before the next name is called.

And it's just when you hear a name, if it's someone you know, if you're a student that's graduating with them, it's really just like what is the first thought that comes in your mind when you hear this student's name before you then move on to somebody else's name.
And I think about with those graduating seniors, how do you want to be known? When somebody sees you or when your name comes up, how do you want people to think of you? What do you want to be known for?
In a similar way, I think that's a question for our church to consider. How do we want to be known? I think we want to be very careful to make sure that we don't do things that would magnify our own name as we answer that question.
And it's admittedly, it's a little bit tricky. As an individual, if you want to be known for something, you want to live in a certain way that people would recognize who you are and what you value and what

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you stand for, but you don't want it to be in a way that someone's praise is directed toward you.
[4:21] You want someone's praise when they think of your name to be quickly directed toward the Lord. The same thing is true for a church. We're not campaigning to be known as the biggest church in town.

We're not campaigning to be known as the church with the biggest building in town. Those things in any certain season of life may be true, may not be true. And those things aren't any indication of faithfulness.
We don't want to live as a congregation in such a way that we want people to hear our church's name and think about how great we are. That's completely self-defeating.
How do we live in a way that people would see our good works, to use New Testament language, yet glorify our Father in heaven? That can be tricky as an individual and certainly as a congregation as well.
I think it's important that we know how to answer the question of what must we do and what kind of church must we be. If we don't know what God desires for a church, then what we end up doing is either being the kind of church that just a certain man or group of men want us to be, or we become the kind of church that we think the world out beyond our walls want us to be.
[5:53] And the problem with that is we could become a church that is highly successful in the world's eyes and completely unfaithful in the eyes of the Lord. So when you consider how do you want to live your life and what do you want people to know about you, or we consider it as a congregation, how do we want people to think of our church?

What must absolutely be clear from the onset is that it must be biblical. We must strive to live in a way both individually and collectively as a congregation in a way that is thoroughly biblical, that we could say when people think of us, they think first of our God.
That's how we want to do it. You hear me say from time to time that we have to fight to keep our life simple. The older I get, the more convinced I am of that.
I think joy in life is found in keeping your life simple. Not easy, but simple.
Whether you are a single adult, whether you are married, whether you have children at home, whether you have grandchildren in your life, whether you are working or at home or retired, whatever your life stage may be, for all of us, the world kind of fights to make our life complicated.
[7:27] And we have to fight to keep our life simple. There are thousands of things you could do, but only a few things you must do.

The same thing is true as a church. There are so many things that a church could do, but a few things that we must do.
And if our church is going to be the kind of church the Lord has called us to be, it's going to be because we, without any wavering, continue to say we will focus on the things we must do.
This is one of the things that seminary, frankly, did not prepare me for. The first time I graduated seminary, this is back in 98.
I graduated seminary. I didn't think I knew everything. I really thought I knew less than when I started. In some ways, my mind was just open to how much more things I did not know. And one of the things that I did not know when I graduated seminary was how much of a pull would be on leadership in a church from people with good hearts and good intentions, not to do bad things, but to put pressure to do so many things.
[9:03] If it's a matter of right or wrong, that's pretty easy. But a church, like a person, like a home, must continue in some ways to fight to keep things simple.

Because while there are so many things we could do, we've got to keep our eyes focused on what we must do. And sometimes churches, just like families, can get so busy and their ministry so complicated that it feels like you're doing a lot and accomplishing little.
And quite frankly, the things the Bible tells us we must do are not always things that are easily measurable and not always things that the outside world will applaud.
And so many times, those things get pushed to the side while churches begin to prop up and focus on things that are much more recognizable. But when we come to the Bible, what we want to do is say, Lord, how do you want us to live?
How do you want our family to prioritize? What things must our church be doing?
[10:36] And the truth of the matter is, sometimes churches that are very faithful are very large. Being a large church does not mean that you're a sellout.

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Being a large church does not mean that you're worldly. Sometimes the Lord and His sovereignty just blesses churches and they are faithful, good churches and they are very large.
But just because a church is large does not mean by itself the church is pleasing to God. Sometimes churches are very small and they're extremely faithful.
And the Lord is at work. And the Spirit is moving. And just because a church is small doesn't in any way mean that they aren't doing things right.
Being small is not a measure of faithfulness any more than being large is. The question is, is God pleased? I could tell you names of very large churches that I find to be extremely faithful and I could tell you names of very large churches that I would tell you to run from.
[11:50] I could tell you names of very small churches that are extremely unfaithful. And I could give you the names of small churches that I think the Lord is extremely glorified through.

So we don't want to look at our church ever or any church ever and say that the measure of success is simply how many people attend or how much money comes in or how large buildings are.
The thing about, and no offense, no offense to my friends out here who are into spreadsheets. That's good. It's okay. I don't want to make my Excel friends nervous here.
Excel is good. It's just a bad way to measure success in a church. But the easiest way to measure, and I'm putting success in quotation marks, is to simply say how many people come, how many people joined, how much money came in.
that's not a, that's no way to measure the faithfulness of a church. By that measurement, Walmart is the most successful church in town.
[13:19] They have more people in there than any church. They bring in more money than any church. The issue for us must never be what does the world say of us, and we must never resort to either feeling good because measurables are high, nor feeling discouraged if one day measurables are low.

The question is always this, is God pleased with us? That's such a harder question in some ways, isn't it?
If you say, how is the church doing? I could tell you how we're doing attendance versus last year, or how we did giving versus last year, or how many members joined versus last year.
And that's, those aren't bad things. There's something to be said for those things, but that's just so much easier to feel good if it's up and bad if it's down.
That's so much easier than to say, I wonder what God thinks about what we're doing. Could it be that churches are growing in number, but God's not pleased?
[14:39] Could it be that some churches are small and being refined and purified, and churches actually are smaller from the previous year, yet it's actually evidence of the Lord at work through that church purifying His church?

All of those things can be true. So, in a world which wants to always make things complicated, we have to fight hard collectively to keep things pretty simple.
What does God say we must do? And are we doing those things? And as we do those things, are we growing in our love for Him and for each other?
Are we serving and doing His will with faith or with our own strength? I praise the Lord for every new member He's brought our way in the last number of months.
The Lord's been very kind to add to our number, and I'm so thankful for everyone who has joined our church in recent days. But whether 100 people join our church in a few months or one joins our church in a few months, either way, what we still must do is say, what does God say about us?
[16:16] That's always the most important question to answer. And so, while there are several places we certainly could go in Scripture to help us with that, 1 Peter 4, 7 through 11, I think, gives us a great snapshot of at least a way that we can with a common language and a common vocabulary pray together and talk together and evaluate together, are we doing what we must do?

Look at this text with me, 1 Peter 4, 7 through 11. The end of all things is at hand. Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.
Above all, keep loving one another earnestly since love covers a multitude of sins. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.
As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.
Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God.

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Whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies. In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.
[17:46] To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. If you want to work to keep life pretty simple, this is a good text for your heart to go to.

This text reminds us to think about the end of all things. It reminds us of how our minds should be governed. It talks to us about love. It talks to us about how to care for each other.
It talks to us about how to serve without complaining. It talks to us about how to use our spiritual gifts and whether your gifts are speaking gifts or serving gifts, how to use them.
And it talks to us about how to do those things in a way that Christ is magnified and the Lord is glorified among us, not ourselves. ourselves. This passage is, I think, a very helpful way for us to consider at the beginning of a new year how we're going to live.
And that in our church there is a life and a joy that should permeate everything that we do. I want this to always be a place where we long to be.
[19:18] I want gathering with God's people and the Lord's day to be something that you don't think in terms of have to go to church today, but instead to say that this is the day the Lord has made.

This is the privilege of God's people to gather with His saints. I want this to be a place that when you're gone for a week, if you're on vacation or you're sick or whatever it may be and you're gone for a week, that you can't wait to be back the next week because you've missed the people who are here.
I want this to be a place where you come every Sunday and say it's not that I left impressed or wowed, it's that I left this place more aware of the greatness of God.
And so with that in mind, let's take some time to walk through this brief passage with some depth to consider how we can live as a church, as individuals, and in our homes with the life and the joy that God's people should have.
We'll be here for a few Sundays, so I don't know how far we'll get this morning, but we'll at least start here in verse 7, that we are to be self-controlled and sober minded.
[20:45] We're to be self-controlled and sober minded. Look at how verse 7 begins, the end of all things is at hand, therefore be self-controlled and sober minded.

To say that the end of all things is at hand means it's approaching, it's imminent. The purpose of all things is at hand. The last days began with Christ's resurrection, so it is fair to say we are today in the last days.
Now, I won't say much about that because on Sunday evenings, we're walking through 1 Thessalonians, we pick up tonight in chapter 5, and it's all about the second coming and the end times, and so on Sunday evenings, we're looking at the events of the return of Christ and the things that the Bible says will take place at His second coming, so I won't say much about that this morning, we will tonight for sure, but think of what's being said here in verse 7, the end of all things is at hand, in other words, we're in the last days, and because that's true, he says, therefore, now, follow Peter's Holy Spirit inspired thought process, because the Lord's return is imminent, therefore, so whatever comes next, is as important of anything you could read in the scripture, because the end is coming, because the Lord is returning, because there will be a rightful call for all people to stand before the
Lord, with that in mind, whatever comes next is something we can't afford to miss. Now, if you have never ever read 1 Peter 4, if this were brand new to you, and it said, because the end of all things is at hand, therefore, you would have to sit up on the edge of your seat and say, I've got to know what the Bible says I must do, because the Lord's coming again, here's what you must do.
And he says, therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded. That's interesting, because you might think that what the Bible is going to say there is something extraordinary.
[23:34] Because Christ is coming again, because the Lord is going to return, that it was going to be this call to some kind of crazy, radical, extraordinary behavior, but that's not what he tells us.

He says, because the end is coming, therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded.
Simple, thoughtful living. if you knew for sure that your life was going to end in 48 hours, what should you do?
Here would be a good place to start. Be self-controlled and sober-minded. God, this really is the simple path to joy and the simple path to magnifying Christ.

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Let's consider these two terms, self-controlled and sober-minded. They are essentially, they're synonymous and should be understood together.
[25:01] It means to be of sound judgment. It means to be in your right mind. It means to be mentally disciplined. If you wonder, why does our church take the Bible so seriously and why is the precision and doctrine such an important thing in our church?

Because that's what God's Word tells us to do. To be self-controlled and sober-minded is to have a mental discipline to think rightly about things.
that we're to harness our passions, not be emotionless, God forbid, but that we live a self-controlled life, that we avoid excess, that we avoid showboating, that we are self-controlled, that we're sober-minded, we have clear thinking that in contrast to being in a drunken state, instead, we would be sober-minded.
in our right mind, thinking clearly, thinking rightly, that to honor the Lord in our worship individually, as a family, as a congregation, is absolutely to have your mind right.
Which brings us to an aspect of church life in our day, which we need to be very careful about here. Because we live in a culture where people are looking for escape.
[26:44] Everywhere you go, people want to escape from real life, escape from pain, escape from disappointment, escape from things that aren't the way they want them to be.

They want to be able to turn their mind off and not feel pain and not feel shame, not feel sadness. And tragically, what happens in many churches is they provide that just with some biblical vocabulary on Sunday mornings.
times. Where you come to a church service and it's all about bypassing the mind just to stir the emotions.
churches. And it makes people very easy targets. You don't talk about things that would be upsetting.
You don't deal with topics that would be difficult. You don't talk about things that could be controversial. You don't bring up anything that would cause someone to be upset or discouraged or disagree.
[28:00] You just keep everything on this emotionally charged level. And what happens when churches do that, people come into the sanctuary and turn their minds off so they can turn their emotions on and now what you get are people who are extremely excited about a God they do not know.

And that's not worship. And it happens all the time. gatherings filled with hypnotic singing and man-centered talks, the mind is bypassed with the goal of merely enticing the emotions.
And the problem with that is that God's word says that we are to be self-controlled and sober minded. And let's be very clear here.
The Christian life should not ever be a life without emotion. God has made us human beings with emotion.
We feel and it's right that we feel. There's joy. There's relief. There's satisfaction.
[29:20] There's grief. There's a sense of loss. All the things that make us human. It's not that we need to try to cut those things out of our life.

It's that we feel those things in light of what we know. How do I know that's true? Because of verse 7. The end of all things is at hand.
So he says think about that. Think about the reality of the end. Think about the reality that Christ is returning. Think about the truth that Jesus is coming again.
Therefore based on what you think of that, based on what you know about that truth, be self controlled. Don't be governed by your emotions.
Be governed by the truth. Now the truth absolutely leads us to feelings.
[30:28] And that's good and that's right. But when you're governed by your feelings, you will not be self controlled nor sober minded.

There are some people in the world who when it's time to wake up in the morning, feel like waking up and going to work. But for others, if you only went to work when you felt like it, business would shut down.
Some students wake up and they can't wait to go to school. But for most students, if you only went to school when you felt like it, you wouldn't know very many things.

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We don't want to be governed by our feelings. We want to think about the truth and the doctrine that Christ is coming again and based on that truth, express it by being self-controlled and by being sober minded.
Now, notice the end of verse 7. For the sake of your prayers. This is so instructive for us because this reminds us that the Christian life certainly includes knowledge and doctrine, what we know, but we'll never be so smart that we've graduated away from needing to be prayerful.
[31:57] We are to study and to know and to have a clear mind for the sake of our prayers. In other words, you cannot be pleasing to the Lord without being faithful in prayer.

Neither can a church. for the Lord to be pleased with the congregation, the church must be a prayerful people. That what we know and what we learn, verse 7, leads us to a strong prayer life.
Now, I want you to notice just in the language here, when it says for the sake of your prayers, that term for prayers is connected to both verbs, self-controlled and to be sober-minded.
That we are to be self-controlled so that we can pray faithfully. We're to be sober-minded so that we can pray in a way that's pleasing to God.
Let me tell you why this is so important. False teachers pray. Pagans pray.
[33:14] confusing as it may be, unbelievers pray. But if we want our prayers to be powerful, if we want our prayers to be strong, we've got to pray from a mind that is self-controlled, sober-minded, and thinking of the reality that Christ is coming again.

To be strong in prayer, we must be clear-minded. pray. And the reason, I think, is pretty simple because if you don't think rightly about God, you can't pray according to His will.
If your mind doesn't know His Word, you cannot pray according to Scripture. We must know His Word and know His heart and have biblical doctrine if we're going to pray in a way that's pleasing to God.
So, it's not that we study the Bible and read it and learn it and memorize Scripture. We don't do all of that so that we can become so powerful we no longer need God.
We study and we pray and we memorize so that we can pray according to His will, knowing that prayer is the fuel and the power behind everything that we do.
[34:55] Without prayer, we cannot and will not be faithful believers nor a faithful congregation. And so, it's never a situation where we can become so smart we no longer need prayer.

God forbid we think that way. But we study, we confess our sin, we obey His Word, we learn His will for the sake of our prayers.
And it's so interesting to me just how this unfolds. Peter writing here talks about the importance of thinking clearly for your prayers to be powerful.
This is the same guy, we just studied this in our study through Mark not too long ago. This is the same guy who at the end of Jesus' earthly life, when He's in the Garden of Gethsemane, asked Peter to pray and instead Peter was sleeping.
And Peter, because he wasn't prayerful, was not thinking clearly and when the mob came to get him, Peter takes out his sword and starts swinging for heads and necks.
[36:12] Well, what would qualify Peter now to write verse seven? He learned his lesson.

Peter firsthand knows that when you're more sleepy than prayerful and more fleshly than godly, you do foolish things.
Peter's learned from that. You're reading the words, the testimony, the Holy Spirit inspired thoughts of someone who had to learn this the hard way.
And now Peter says, for the sake of your prayers, be self-controlled and sober-minded. we want to pray consistent with the Word of God.
We can't do that if we don't know the Scripture. We want to pray for the power of the Spirit of God to be at work. We can't do that if we're thinking wrongly.
[37:27] And so with clear minds and submissive hearts, we depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit. But the challenge is, you can't put on any spreadsheet to compare 2024 to 2023 to say, am I trusting in God?

Am I praying according to His will? It's far easier to just simply say, did more money come in this year than last year? Did more people come this year than last year? Did more people join this year than last year?
Did we start more classes this year than last year? Those things are far easier just to look at because it's not anything we have to really wrestle with. But I want to ask you, what is it that God

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says to His people we must do?
We must think about the reality of His return, and in light of that, live a self-controlled life, live a sober-minded life, and pray according to His will.
It's a wonderful thing to read through the Bible in a year. We had many, many from our church who completed that last year, and others are doing it this year, and I encourage you to read through the Bible in a year. I think it's a great way to challenge yourself, to pace yourself, to organize yourself, to get all of God's Word in your heart and in your mind.
[39:02] It's a good thing to read through the Bible in a year. Here's the challenge though. At the end of the year, you can look at your printout and say, I either yes or no, I did or I didn't, I completed it or I didn't.

But let me tell you what's a bit harder. If you completed reading through the Bible in a year, you're going to ask yourself, am I living a more sober-minded life?
Am I thinking more clearly? Am I living a more self-controlled life? Am I yielding to the will of the Lord and the power of the Spirit?
Am I praying in a way that is in accordance with His Word and His will? It's not as easy as just saying that I check off all the boxes for every day.
It's deeper than that. Am I allowing the Word of God that I'm reading to so penetrate every part of my being that my mind, my emotions, and my prayer life is all impacted by what I'm taking in?
[40:16] This is what we must do. And frankly, this just takes a bit of time. It takes a bit of time to think that way.

If I were to ask you, did you read the Bible in a year? That's just yes or no. That's just easy. You did or you didn't. But what's more difficult to answer and maybe more helpful to consider is of whatever you read and of whatever you took in, whether it was all the Bible or just a portion of it, is it so impacting your life that you are today more self-controlled and more sober-minded and more prayerful because of what you've learned to be true about God.
This is how we are to live, self-controlled and sober-minded. Let me ask you as we conclude here, turn to Philippians, just back to the left a little bit to Philippians.
I just want to read to you a similar passage saying some of the same truths here in a slightly different way here.
Philippians 4. Philippians 4. Philippians 4. Verse 1.
[41:42] Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved. It's a reminder that we're to stand firm.

There's things we know. There's things we're committed to. There's things we don't retreat from. There's things we don't back up from. We're standing firm in the truth of God's Word. Verse 2.
I entreat you, Odeon. I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers whose names are in the book of life.
Rejoice in the Lord always. And again, I say rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone.
So, how do we want to be known as reasonable people? Reasonable according to what? According to the Word and the will of God. Well, what's reasonable?
[42:48] If you really believe that the Bible is God's Word, the reasonable thing is to study it. And if you really believe that all of Scripture is breathed out by God and is profitable for you, as the Scripture says, then the reasonable thing to do is to obey it.

And if you really believe that salvation is through Christ alone, the reasonable thing is to tell it.
And if you really believe that the Lord is the rewarder of those who obey Him, the reasonable thing to do is to honor Him in all that you say and all that you do.
So that when people hear your name, they will think to themselves whether they agree or not with your thoughts in the Bible, they will at least say they were reasonable.
They said they believed the Bible and they obeyed it. They really believed salvation was only in Christ and they kept saying that to people. They really believed that God answered prayer and they spent time praying.
[44:04] They really believed the Bible was the Word of God and so they memorized it. Whatever someone may think about your beliefs, at least let it be logical to them that when they think of you, they say they at least lived consistent with their beliefs.

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Let your reason was to be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.
Let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
In Philippians 4, prayer is the way we fight against our anxiety, against our fears.
In 1 Peter 4 that we read this morning, we are to be sober-minded for the sake of our prayers.
`[45:19]` In other words, in both places, what we know to be true about God leads us to pray and how we pray in light of the truth of who God is brings us to peace.

That is not to say that your life will be easy. It is to say that you can keep your life simple.
The way to fight your nervousness, your fears, your anxieties, all these things is to have a clear mind that knows the truth, believes the truth, obeys the truth, prays the truth.
And now verse 7, the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.
When Paul writes Philippians, he's not ultimately being guarded by Roman soldiers, he's being guarded by the peace of God. And the reason that's true is because he knows the truth and what he knows he prays.
`[46:44]` And the result is the peace of God. So what kind of church must we be? We must be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of our prayers.

Lord, we are grateful for your word that helps us and gives us insight. Lord, I do pray this morning that it would quicken our steps to be more eager to obey you and to honor you.
Lord, I pray for those who may not know you as Savior that they would even this day understand that you are the God who saves. that they would turn from their sin confess their need for a Savior believing the truth of your word that those who call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.
Lord, may we be self-controlled may we be sober-minded for the sake of our prayers. May we be prayerful people a prayerful congregation seeking to live in a way not that would be pleasing to man or to the world but that you would look at us and be glorified that the name of your Son the Lord Jesus would be lifted high among us and that while this world may fight to keep things complicated we would labor to keep our life and our church simple and that is to say simply what must we do and we start today with the confession that we long to be sober-minded self-controlled for the sake of our prayers in Christ's name Amen heard or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or or

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