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The Force Of The Word "Except" In Matthew 19:9

Pat Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

Matthew 19:9 reads, "And I say unto you, Whoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery." The force of the exception here is that all other causes for divorce and remarriage are ruled out as being scriptural.

For demonstration of that compare to:

- John 3:3 "*except* a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." That would mean there is no other way to enter the kingdom besides being born again, right?
- Luke 13:3 "*except* ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish." This would rule out all other ways to avoid perishing without repentance, right?
- John 8:24 "*except* ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (**ASV**). That verse implies there is no other way to avoid dying in sin, other than believing in Christ.

Likewise Matthew 19:9a ("Whosoever shall put away his wife, **except** it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery") rules out all other scriptural causes to divorce and remarry. There is no other cause for divorce permitted by God in His word!

And we should emphasize this exception, because God allows such and because the exception proves the rule. Many will get the idea God's no divorce law is just the "ideal" unless we stress there is just one and

So You Want to be a Preacher: How Do You Take Correction?

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

Taking correction is a part of living. Taking correction is a part of living. It begins when we are children and are rebuked for doing something wrong, or for not doing something right, like cleaning up our room. And it continues through our teen and adult years. Even Jesus Christ was criticized time and again by his enemies.

And preachers are not immune to receiving criticism from those we serve. The attitude of a preacher clearly contributes to how successful his ministry is, whether he builds up or tears down. Preachers have been known to drive people away because of their poor attitudes in receiving criticism. We can look at some instances in the Bible where criticisms or charges were made, and note how they were received.

We know of David's adultery with Bathsheba. In time, Nathan told David about a rich man who stole and cooked his neighbor's pet lamb. David was incensed at this foul deed, and told what should be done to the rich man. "Nathan then said to David, "You are the man! Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'It is I who anointed you king over Israel and it is I who delivered you from the hand of Saul" (2 Samuel 12:7). Nathan went on to explain the consequences of David's sin.

And how did the King respond? "Then David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.'" (verse 13) David did not speak in anger against the prophet, nor did he try to shift the blame by pointing at Bathsheba's poor decision to bathe where she could be seen.

We remember when God confronted Adam concerning the eating of the forbidden fruit, Adam pretty much blamed his sin on God. "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate" (Genesis 3:12). It was all God's fault. It God had not created Eve, then Adam would not have sinned, seems to be Adam's reasoning.

I must confess that I do not like correction or rebuke. I don't like to take medicine, either. But I know medicine is for my good, so I take it. And correction is also for my good, and I need to take it in a good spirit. The writer of Hebrews goes to some length to deal with chastening or discipline from the Lord, and points out that it is for our good.

"For whom the Lord loves he chastens, And scourges every son whom he receives.

It is for chastening that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son

is there whom his father chastens not?" (Hebrews 12:6-7)

Then note verse 11: "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness."

Proverbs has much to say about receiving correction. "He is on the path of life who heeds instruction, But he who forsakes reproof goes astray" (10:17). "Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates reproof is stupid." (12:1). "Poverty and shame will come to him who neglects discipline, But he who regards reproof will be honored" (13:18). "He whose ear listens to the life-giving reproof Will dwell among the wise. He who neglects discipline despises himself, But he who listens to reproof acquires understanding" (15:31-32).

Those who want to preach should cultivate the spirit of David, whom God described as "a man after My heart" (Acts 13:22). David's attitude is much preferred over that of Diotrephes, who evidently refused to receive John's instruction (3 John 9-10). I am sorry to say that I have known preachers who seem highly offended if someone offered a correction, even in the right spirit. And their attitude has driven disciples

away from the church. If they cause a soul to be lost, God will hold them accountable for their souls, as well as their own soul.

"My Acceptance"

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

I received a little book in the mail some time ago entitled, "The Path To Peace." The subtitle said, "Finding Hope In A Troubling World." It contained several articles, but one thing really stood out as I began to read. On page 21, at the bottom of the page, there were the words, "My Acceptance." It then said, "I Accept Christ as my personal Savior; I ask Him to forgive my sins and enable me to live the new life of love, trust, and faith. I am Christ's; I have given myself to Him." Many know this as the sinner's prayer. It is taught in the religious world today all you must do to be saved is to pray this prayer, asking the Lord to come into your heart, and you will be forgiven of all your sins. Is this what is taught in the Bible?

When the Jews on Pentecost, who were gathered from every nation under heaven (Acts 1:5), asked Peter what to do to be saved, how did he respond? They were told to,:

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for

the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38).

The Bible then says, "Then those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41). The Lord added them to the church or to the saved when they complied with His terms of pardon (Acts 2:47). They were not told to pray for forgiveness.

We read of the conversion of Saul in Acts 9 while traveling to Damascus to persecute Christians. After Jesus appeared to him, he asked, "So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?" He was told to arise and go into the city and there it would be revealed to him what he must do (Acts 9:6). Over the next several verses the writer reveals to us that Saul was blind, led into the city by his traveling companions, without food and drink for three days, and praying (Acts 9:8-12). Ananias was instructed by God to go to this man so that he might receive his sight and be forgiven of his sins when he followed the commands of the Lord (Acts 9:10-16). The man of God did what the Lord told him to do, though in the beginning he was hesitant (Acts 9:13-14). The record in Acts 9 simply states the scales fell from his eyes, thus he received his sight, and he arose, and was baptized (Acts 9:18). In Acts 22, Saul or Paul told his audience what Ananias told him to do in Acts 9, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (verse 16). He had already been praying yet we find him still in his sins. Baptism was the final step in receiving forgiveness and not prayer.

In Acts 16:7 we read of the conversion of the Philippian jailer. Paul and Silas are in prison and a great earthquake shook the jail, opening the doors to all the cells (Acts 16:25-26). The guard was awakened from sleep thinking all the prisoners had escape and was about to commit suicide (Acts 16:27). Paul said do yourself no harm for all the inmates are still here (Acts 16:28). This jailer fell before Paul and Silas, asking what he must do to be saved (Acts 16:29-30). According to many in the religious world he should have been told to pray the sinner's prayer yet that was not what he was instructed to do. He was told to believe on the Lord (Acts 16:31). They then taught him the word of God, and he and his family were immediately baptized (Acts 16:32-33). No sinner's prayer!

We have a case in the Bible where one was told to repent and pray for forgiveness. It was Simon the sorcerer in Acts 8. He had already been saved by the blood of Christ through obedience to the will of God and then sinned. Notice the record says he had believed and was baptized (Acts 8:13). We know baptism is for the remission of sins according to the Scriptures (Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Peter 3:21, etc.). So, he was saved when he submitted to the will of the Lord. Yet after he had been obedient, he then tried to buy the ability to lay hands on others so they could receive the Holy Spirit like the apostles (Acts 8:17-19). Peter told him his heart was not right with God, and he needed to repent and pray for the forgiveness of the sin which he had committed (Acts 8:20-23). This is God's law of pardon for the child of God who sins after becoming a Christian. No one in the New Testament who was not a Christian was told to pray for

forgiveness.

The Bible says nothing about a sinner's prayer. What one must do is to follow the word of the Lord. If you are not a Christian, you must believe Jesus is the son of God (John 8:24), repent of your sins (Luke 13:3, 5), confess Jesus as Lord (Matthew 10:32-33), and be baptized for the remission of sins (Mark 16:16). God will save you by His grace and add you to the body of Christ (Acts 2:47). As a Christian He requires of us to be faithful in His service until death (1 Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10). Our Father is merciful and willing to cleans us of our sins when we are willing to simply submit to Him!

How the Devil Changes Us

Mike Thomas | Bowling Green, Kentucky, USA

The Bible offers this warning: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Is that real or is it fantasy? Does Satan literally seek us as individual Christians to try to get us to fall away from serving the Lord? Or was Peter simply using colorful language to capture the reader's attention – with the understanding that the devil does not actually work against believers? In other words, is Satan actively trying to get you (you!) to abandon or compromise your relationship with God? The only conclusion I can reach is that Peter was saying that very thing. The devil works in this world to lure people away from serving God.

If ever there is a metaphor in the Bible that we need to understand it is in this warning from Peter. The devil may not take bodily form as a literal lion, but he does walk about (interact in) this world looking for saints to destroy. Granted, he has been bound for a thousand years "so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished" (Revelation 20:3), which I understand to refers to his limitations in this world. He and his demons are unable to possess people like they once did (Mark 1:34, 39), since that was for a limited time (Mark 16:17-20) and was used to announce the arrival of the kingdom of God (Luke 11:20), but the devil is still very much active through the spiritual forces of evil. Or as Paul stated:

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Ephesians 6:12).

The **Contemporary English Version** says, "We are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world." I believe that to be a reality. We literally have evil forces in the spiritual world that are actively promoting wickedness in this world for the express purpose of detracting people away from God. They will never be as powerful as Christ and His influence, which is why we should put on the whole armor of God that we "may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (6:13). Yet the threat of being devoured is very much real and we should be alert to it.

The main weapon of Satan is deceit. He uses trickery to change how we view God's will and how we respond to it. Eve bit into the forbidden fruit because she believed the devil's lie about finding something better in disobeying God. "Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil'" (Genesis 3:4-5). Though the bodily form of the devil has changed, and we no longer have a restriction against a particular type of fruit, we still have things God tells us to avoid that Satan encourages us to accept. Paul told Christians who had the task of forgiving one another to do so "lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:11). He is still very much in the business of persuading people to believe a lie in carrying out evil. Hence, "be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Ephesians 6:10-11).

If Eve had understood she was being stalked by the devil, she would have likely avoided looking at the forbidden fruit and taking a bite of it. But are you and I any better? Do we not see through the lies the devil

tells in the media, on the internet, at the workplace, or even in local churches? The devil is actively promoting evil by the skimpy clothes people are encouraged to wear. He is the author of the innuendo of a sensuous commercial and is the ultimate producer of profane lyrics in music. He is behind the false doctrines that craftily convince Christians to worship God apart from truth or to spend the Lord's money in ways He does not authorize. The lion walks the hallways at school, is present at family trouble, and is in the heart of every Christian who quits the Lord. He is in churches that depart from New Testament principles and is in Bible studies that encourage students to adopt new and conflicting doctrines. Temptation is real, evil influences are present in this world, and there are spiritual forces that want to entice us away from God. Thus, be sober! Be vigilant! Test all things spiritual and always be ready to avoid evil. Satan is looking for you; are you looking for him?

Let All The Earth Keep Silence

IS THAT REALLY WHAT IT MEANS? William Stewart | Odessa, Ontario, Canada

...the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him. (Habakkuk 2:20)

These words have been set to a beautiful tune and appear in some songbooks. The phrase (let all the earth keep silence) has been used (both the Bible text and the song from it) have been used at times to compel people to hush, and silently prepare themselves for worship.

There is certainly nothing wrong with people being silent before engaging in worship. In fact, there can be a great benefit to such. At the same time, there is nothing in the Bible (Habakkuk 2:20 included) which commands a time of silence prior to participating in worship, whether in a private or public setting.

To use Habakkuk 2:20 as a precursor to worship is to use it in a way that the prophet himself did not use it. Let's take a look at the context of Habakkuk 2:20. Rather than just going 7 verses back and 7 verses ahead, which I often suggest to provide a 15 verse context, we will look at the whole book.

In Habakkuk's day, evil prevailed among the people of God (1:1-4). His description of the nation is consistent with what is said about the time of Manasseh (2 Kings 21). Recall, the eventual destruction which would befall Judah was because of the sins of Manasseh (2 Kings 23:26; 24:3). Habakkuk writes before God's judgment against Judah is exercised. In fact, he writes before Babylon rose to the status of a world power (1:5-11).

As troubled as the prophet was with the wickedness plaguing his nation, it troubled him even further that God's solution was to destroy them by using pagan people. Habakkuk reasoned about God's justice and Chaldean wickedness (1:12-17). He then prepared to hear God, and to be corrected by Him (2:1). As the LORD spoke, the prophet is reminded of a fundamental truth about God's people: "...the just shall live by his faith" (2:4).

Don't be concerned about the physical welfare of those who are mistreated by a wicked people (the Judeans or the Babylonians), for those who are God's are focused on the spirit, not the flesh.

God is mindful of the righteous, and He'll take care of them. He is also aware of the wicked (whether the Jews or the Babylonians), and they will receive according to their works. The futility of the wicked is the focus of 2:5-20. In verses 18-19, the LORD speaks of the idols of the wicked, made of wood, overlaid with gold and silver, or of stone. Idols that are associated with lies and yet do not speak, in whom is no life. A chunk of wood will not awaken, a stone will not rise up and teach.

Don't focus on such false gods, but on the LORD God of heaven. He is in His holy temple; He's in heaven above and presides over all the earth. He is a living God; His word has been revealed, and it is truth. All the earth, not Christians gathered to worship, are commanded to keep silence, to hold their peace, to be

still. The text establishes a contrast between the one true God and the false idols of men.

The text closes with the prophet praying for God's mercy to be upon them, even in the midst of His wrath (3:1). Though destruction was eminent, Habakkuk still found joy in the Lord and praised Him, for He makes salvation available to His people, to those who are righteous and will walk the high road of faith in God (3:18-19).

"Faith, Hope, and Love Remain - These Three"

Michael Hickox | Olney, Illinois, USA

1 Corinthians 12-14 contains the most extensive teaching in Scripture about miraculous spiritual gifts Christians had prior to the completion of God's written Word. Among the carnal views the Corinthian brethren had of these miraculous gifts was an exaltation of the gifts themselves above the attitude of love with which the gifts were to be exercised.

This provides the setting for the beloved chapter, 1 Corinthians 13. The chapter shows that walking in love is more important than how many gifts one had, or how "impressive" one's gifts were.

One of the ways this point is shown is by comparing the duration of the age of miraculous gifts to that of love. Verse 10 of the chapter says, "when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." Verses 8-9 show that "that which is in part" refers to miraculous gifts, like prophesying, speaking in tongues, and miraculous knowledge. These gifts would no longer be needed when the written Word ("that which is perfect") was completed. Thus, these gifts would be "done away" with.

On the other hand, verse 13 says, "faith, hope, and love remain – these three." The Holy Spirit through Paul foretold of a time that miraculous gifts would no longer be possessed by Christians, but faith, hope, and love still would be.

This time has been realized for many centuries now, and thus we can perhaps appreciate 1 Corinthians 13:13 in a way that would have been difficult for the Corinthian brethren. None of us can speak in tongues, miraculously heal people, etc., but faith, hope, and love continue to be of utmost importance.

Faith, for instance, continues to be the foundation of the faithful Christian's life, as it was in the first century.

As Paul said in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "for we walk by faith, not by sight." The Christian sees by faith what cannot be literally seen with the eyes. This "spiritual sight" comes from the Word of God, which produces faith in the hearts of sincere hearers (John 20:29-31; Romans 10:17; Matthew 13:23).

Hope continues to be the anchor of the faithful Christian's soul, as it was in the first century. As the writer said in Hebrews 6:19, "This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and entering into that which is within the veil." The faithful Christian lays up "treasures in heaven" (Matthew 6:20) and has assurance, by faith (Hebrews 11:1), that God will grant to the righteous exactly what He has promised.

Love continues to be the proper motivation for the faithful Christian's obedience, as it was in the first century.

As the Holy Spirit through John said, "this is loving God, that we keep His commandments" (1 John 5:3). 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 show how love for others is at the root of treating others rightly (also see Rom. 13:9-10).

While miraculous spiritual gifts had an important purpose, the Holy Spirit through Paul made clear that their role should not be made into something more than it was.

At the same time, faith, hope, and love should not be under-valued, but appreciated and pursued, as they are at the core of the Christian's life, both then and now.

The Atonement

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

One cannot imagine a more important subject than the Atonement. The death of Christ is the only hope for lost humanity. If He died for all mankind without exception or limitation, then all lost sinners may in reality look to Jesus for salvation (John 3:14-15). If not, then only those individuals whom God has predestined to life can seek salvation in the Son, and the rest are doomed to irremediable, eternal despair.

A Presbyterian preacher with a doctor of theology posed this question in a home Bible study in Syracuse, New York when I was present, "If you're not one of God's elect, what can you do about it?" His answer to his own question was, "Nothing." How tragic! I believe **The Scriptures teach that Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation**.

In this article I will follow a principle of Bible study stated by the great Calvinistic theologian Charles Hodge: "... it is the duty of the theologian to subordinate his theories to the Bible, and teach not what seems to him to be true or reasonable, but simply what the Bible teaches." (Hodge. 2:559) This simply means we must elevate divine revelation above human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18 - 2:13). Thus, I will only reference those passages which explicitly state universal atonement.

These passages may be divided into two categories: those that say Christ died for "all" and the ones which state He died for the "world."

First the scriptures that state Jesus died for "all." I realize the word "all" is limited by its context. But unless the context does limit the term, it is universal. In other words, it means "all lost humans without exception or limitation."

"And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself.' "This He said, signifying by what death He would die." (John 12:32-33)

Jesus' death was for the purpose of drawing "all peoples" to Him. The "world" of verse 31 is a specific reference to the non-elect. "Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out." Rather than limiting the "all peoples" to the elect, the context specifically demands that the phrase refers to "all lost humans without exception or limitation."

Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. (Romans 5:18)

The "all" who may be righteous as the result of Jesus' sacrifice is as broad as the "all" condemned by sin. In other words, Jesus "died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15)

The Lord died for as many as died. "[A]II lost humans without exception or limitation" have died spiritually. Therefore, "Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."

"For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, "who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time," (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

The "all" for whom Christ died are the "all" God desires to be saved (verses 3-4). In context, "all" of 1 Timothy 2:3-6 refers to everyone lost, whether elect or condemned (verses 1-2).

"For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." (1 Timothy 4:10)

God is the "Savior" in that, among other things, He sent His Son to die on the cross for our redemption. The "all" for whom He is Savior is a larger group than "those who believe." Thus, "**Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation.**"

But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)

The "everyone" for whom Jesus tasted death includes the elect (verses 10-13) but is not limited to them. Rather, it includes "all lost humans without exception or limitation." (verses 5-8). Therefore, "Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."

The second set of passages state that Christ died for the "world." Certainly the term "world" is often used in a limited sense, but when so used it denotes the wicked in contrast with the elect (John 12:31; 15:19). Will Calvinists contend that God's saving love is for the wicked but not for the elect?

"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29)

Either the "world" means only the non-elect, or it means "all lost humans without exception or limitation." Certainly Christ did not die only for the non-elect. Therefore, "Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:16-17)

The "world" for whom Christ died includes all whom God loves.

Then they said to the woman, 'Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world.' (John 4:42)

Again, either the "world" means only the non-elect, or it means "all lost humans without exception or limitation." Which is it?

"For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:33)

The "world" for whom Jesus is the bread of life includes those who refuse to believe Him (verses 32, 36). Jesus is the "bread of life" in that He gave His "flesh ... for the life of the world" (verse 51). Therefore, "Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."

"And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world." (John 12:47).

The "world" Jesus came to save includes both those who believe Him (verse 46) and those who reject Him (verse 48). Though He did not come the first time to judge the "world" (verse 47), one day, by His Word, He will judge the "world." (verse 48) The "world" He will judge includes both the saved and condemned (John 5:22-29). Thus, "Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation."

Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

The "world" God is reconciling to Himself in Christ is the "all" who died (verses 14-15). So, "**Christ died for** all lost humans without exception or limitation."

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).

The "whole world" for whom Jesus Christ is the "propitiation" (verse 2) is a larger group than those for whom He is Advocate (verse 1). I cannot comprehend how John could have made it clearer that "**Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation.**"

"And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world." (1 John 4:14)

Jesus is not only "the propitiation for our sins" (verse 10), He is also the "Savior of the world," a "world" larger than the group for whom He is Advocate.

These fifteen passages emphatically, plainly state Christ died for "all," i.e., for the "world." If the Lord had wanted to teach that the scope of the atoning sacrifice of His Son is universal, unlimited, among lost, human sinners, how could He have more emphatically and plainly stated it? **The Scriptures teach that Christ died for all lost humans without exception or limitation.**

Work Cited

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(This article is substantially the same as my affirmative article on "The Atonement" in the book **Calvinism on Trial**, a series of fourteen written debates between David N. Landon of the Reformed Presbyterian Church and me. You can purchase this book from Faith & Facts Press, 6530 Michigan Rd., Indianapolis, IN 46268-2732.)

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