



Implementation of Kingdom of God's Ethic in the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Digital Age

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Abstract

This paper aims to explain the ethics of the kingdom of God in the Old Testament perspective that is still little discussed, especially in the Book of Ecclesiastes, and how it is implemented in contemporary Christian life. Data was collected through the literature study method and data analysis was conducted by reviewing Bible verses and various literature on the kingdom of God from the Old Testament perspective. The results showed that the kingdom of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes is understood inclusively-exclusively as God's eternal rule over His people through General Revelation, General Grace, and in the Person of Jesus Christ, where the ethical values of the kingdom of God contained in the Book of Ecclesiastes are in the form of understanding God as the Creator of all things, the Holder of the Power of Life and unfathomable Wisdom. The implementation of the ethical values of the kingdom of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes is anticipating the challenges of religious radicalism, realizing common grace, obeying worship to God, not loving money, avoiding the trap of materialism, not deifying technology, being both 'salt' and 'light' for this world and consistently carrying out the mission of preaching the Gospel of Christ in this world continuously as citizens of His Kingdom.

Keywords: Book of Ecclesiastes, Ethics, Kingdom of God, Old Testament

Introduction

Theologians agree that the main theme in the Gospel is that the Kingdom of God has come through the message and actions of Jesus Christ (Matthew 4:12-17; Mark 1:2-3, 14-15; Luke 4:14-21, 43). Through the ministry of Christ, the Kingdom of God was revealed to all those who heard His teachings and saw the signs and wonders He performed. In this theological framework, the Kingdom of God is understood as the reign of God that has entered this age through the ministry of Christ and will be consummated at His second coming. However, the reality of the Kingdom of God should not be understood exclusively from the perspective of the New Testament alone. It should be noted that the Old Testament also initiated the idea and reality of the Kingdom of God. Many books in the Old Testament express the idea of God's rule as King over the universe and His people. For example, various passages in the Book of Isaiah speak of God as King and His rule as well as His role as Deliverer and Savior of His

people. Also in Jewish literature the Qumran manuscripts and the Targum paraphrase of Isaiah 24:23 which reads: "The kingdom of the LORD of hosts will be revealed on Mount Zion" as well as Isaiah 52:7 in Aramaic paraphrase which states: "The kingdom of your God is revealed" and in the Book of Psalms (Stassen & Gushee, 2013). The term "kingdom of God" appears in Jewish literature within the framework of the idea that God is present and reigns in the world. This idea is evident in the Targums in Isaiah 24:23 and Isaiah 40:9 which also state that God is the King who rules the world with all His omnipotence and glory (Priana, 2019). Furthermore, the idea of God as King can be seen in His act of freeing the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt, known as the Exodus (Yang, 2014). The revelation of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament is also expressed in the form of "messianic expectations" which focus on a future kingdom led by a Messiah figure sent by God to bring salvation to God's people, who are referred to as his nation (*laos gk.*) (Nicolaidis, 2010). and the world and establish a kingdom of peace and justice (Rose, 2001).

Discussing the topic of the kingdom of God in the book of Ecclesiastes is interesting because, in terms of its content, the book of Ecclesiastes belongs to literature that contains wisdom teachings that are still questioned by some scholars. After all, they are considered inaccurate with the exclusive meaning of the Kingdom of God declared by Christ in the New Testament mentioned above. This assessment arises because the understanding of the essence of the kingdom of God is considered more dominant in the New Testament, especially through Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount are believed to be more prophetic than wisdom teachings (Stassen & Gushee, 2013). However, this article refers to the understanding of the basic concept of the Kingdom of God that is widely revealed throughout the Bible which has more inclusive-exclusive characteristics, where the kingdom of God is understood as God's eternal rule over the universe and His people, from creation to its eschatological fulfillment in the last days (Blanchard, 2003; Nicolaidis, 2010).

The revelation of the idea of the kingdom of God is found in the book of Ecclesiastes, especially in the form of the ethical values of the kingdom of God, which are expressed in the prominent attributes of God as described in the book of Ecclesiastes, namely as the Creator, the Power Holder of Life and Unsearchable Wisdom (Kidner, 1997). It should be understood that ethics and the kingdom of God have a very close relationship because in the kingdom of God ethical values are prioritized and upheld as moral guidelines and life behavior expectations of God's people who participate in the kingdom of God. Therefore, this article aims to explain how the ethical values of the kingdom of God in the book of Ecclesiastes are implemented in the lives of believers today who live in the digital era.

Methodology

The study method used in writing this scientific article was a literature study. For this reason, the author analyzed various kinds of literature that are relevant to the topic of discussion (Darmawan & Asriningsari, 2018), especially regarding the ethics and kingdom of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes which is expressed as the prominent attributes of God, namely as the Creator, the Power Holder of Life, and the Unsearchable Wisdom. The results of the analysis and study of various literature related to this research topic are then presented descriptively, systematically, and practically. Starting with a discussion of the meaning of ethics, the kingdom of God, and the ethics of the kingdom of God, are considered followed by a discussion of the meaning and implementation of the ethics of the kingdom of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Results and Discussion

Definition of the Kingdom of God Ethic

The definition of the Ethics of the Kingdom of God as an idea or basic concept in this article is described in three parts of the discussion to facilitate understanding, namely the words "Ethics",

"Kingdom of God" and "Ethics of the Kingdom of God". First, the word "Ethics" is generally understood as a scientific discipline that studies life values that influence human behavior (Solomon, 2005;). In line with this understanding, Eka Darmaputera asserts that ethics concerns the values that a person believes about what is good, right, and proper (Darmaputera, 2009). Bertens then concludes that ethics is a science that studies a collection of values about right and wrong adopted by a group or society (Bertens, 1994). In essence, ethics are values that regulate and influence human attitudes and behavior (Nicolaidis, 2016, 2020; Nicolaidis & Duho, 2019).

Secondly, the word "Kingdom of God", as mentioned at the beginning of this article, is that the kingdom of God has come and was revealed through the life and ministry of Christ on earth. However, the biblical interpretation of this phrase still has pros and cons between the use of the phrase "The Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven", especially in the Gospel of Matthew which uses both phrases at once. However, this article does not attempt to explain the different meanings of the two phrases, but will use the phrase "Kingdom of God" (*Basileia tou Theou* gk.), considering that the phrase "Kingdom of God" is more widely used by the evangelists, compared to the phrase "Kingdom of Heaven".

Essentially, biblical scholars examine the word "Kingdom" (*Basileia*) more closely with the phrase "Kingdom of God" because it is synonymous with the Aramaic word "Malkuth" which can mean "reign", "sovereignty" and "kingly rule" referring to the authority exercised by a king (Tumanan, 2008). This is closely related to the idea of kingship in which Yahweh reigns as the King of Israel which is reflected in Israel's political life which is concerned with governance, power, and justice (Brueggemann, 2009). In addition, Ladd and Hagner, emphasize that when talking about the meaning of the Kingdom of God, it always means the government of God and not talking about the territory or the implementation of the government (Ladd & Hagner, 1993). The meaning of the kingdom of God is the reality of God's rule yesterday, today (here) and in the future (Romans 4:17). The kingdom of God is revealed through General Revelation and the divine, progressive, and eternal self-revelation of Jesus Christ (Blanchard, 2003; Pramudya, 2000). However, the essence is the values of the Kingdom (Surbakti, 2014). It can thus be concluded that the meaning of the phrase "kingdom of God" is the essence of the reality of God's reign concerning the quality of His state (attributes), His dignity or power as King (Kingship), and the expression of the values of that kingdom which have a divine, actual, progressive and eternal dimension.

Third, the ethics of the kingdom of God relates to the ethical truth values of the kingdom of God that are factually manifested in the thoughts, attitudes, and actions of God concerning the lives of the people of the kingdom of God. These ethical values of the kingdom of God are realized in God's rule over His people in this world. Therefore, the ethical values of the kingdom of God are realized and implemented by the people of God in their daily lives, both in relationships or relations with God, self, and others. Thus, the ethics of the kingdom of God is a way of life in the form of God's attitudes, thoughts, and actions in the lives of His people and concerns the attitude of every Christian as a citizen of the kingdom of God, where this part is integrated with the spirituality of Christians both in theological and practical terms (Novalina, 2020).

The Meaning and Implications of Kingdom of God Ethics in the Book of Ecclesiastes

In this section, the discussion will begin with the background of the author of this book. The authorship of Ecclesiastes, which belongs to the books of wisdom in Jewish literature, is still debatable. Either the author was Solomon, the son of David who became king in Jerusalem in place of his father King David (Ecclesiastes 1:1), or the conclusions revealed in the book suggest that Solomon was the unlikely author, or the author was a man named Ecclesiastes and he was a teacher who researched and wrote his compositions and identified himself as superior to the wise Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1:16) (Tidball, 1996). Roper and Groenewald say

that the author of Ecclesiastes was a member of the "wise men" who had maintained their identity since the beginning of Israel's monarchy (Roper & Groenewald, 2013).

Apart from the above, it is interesting to note Henry's statement in his commentary on the authorship of Ecclesiastes that Solomon is the author of this book. King Solomon wrote his book as a sermon of repentance after he repented in his old age and determined to teach God's ways to the transgressors in his life (Ecclesiastes 51:15) where he sadly regretted his folly and mistakes (Henry, 2016). This is supported by internal scriptural references that state 'I am king over Israel' (Ecclesiastes 1:12), 'I have enlarged and increased wisdom more than all those who ruled over Jerusalem before me' (Ecclesiastes 1:16), 'I have more cattle than anyone else in Jerusalem' (Ecclesiastes 2:7, 9) (Biwul, 2017). Later Longman also shared that Solomon in his old age looked back at his past life, especially at the time of his apostasy from God, and wrote of his vain life to teach the dangers of living away from the true God (Longman, 1998). Although there is much speculation and debate on the authorship of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the evidence for King Solomon as its author has strong internal support.

Based on the literature review and the results of the analysis, the Ethics of the Kingdom of God revealed in the Book of Ecclesiastes can be interpreted as God's actions in ruling humans through His prominent and main characteristics, namely as follows:

God as the Creator

God's authority and sovereignty as Creator is manifested in the General Revelation which is a form of human inner knowledge of God's existence, where Ecclesiastes reveals that God gives eternity in the human heart (Ecclesiastes 3:11). This is what is meant by the census divinity in the form of ethical value in every human being created by God who is endowed with the consciousness of understanding God's power as Creator and through this consciousness, humans should realize the existence of God as Creator, worship Him as the Almighty and believe in His eternal divinity (Romans 1:20). However, modern man, especially the younger generation, often forgets his Creator (Ecclesiastes 12:1). This condition then causes the understanding of this General Revelation to be distorted, then it may be interpreted wrongly and excessively by groups of religious fundamentalists who emerge due to the influence of modern culture and security (Kholis, 2018). This factor eventually triggers the emergence of radical religious ideologies in many "devout and religious" believers.

First, the ethical value of the Kingdom of God taught in the Book of Ecclesiastes about the awareness of God's existence as the Creator, is the ethical life values of the kingdom of God that should be taught to the digital generation which is currently allegedly exposed to the notion of religious intolerance that has characterized many religions that exist in this world since centuries ago (Hermann, 2017). Coupled with technological advances, it is clear that people today are more familiar with all types of information in cyberspace, especially regarding the understanding of religious intolerance that is spread in it. People who live in the digital era are more familiar with the virtual world than the real world of God's creation, so awareness of the General Revelation, namely the existence of God in this universe, is distorted. This problem should be a serious concern for the clergy, teachers, and parents, and there is a need to find a way to anticipate this corrosive condition.

Secondly, the value in the ethics of the kingdom of God expressed in the Book of Ecclesiastes which affirms the existence of God as Creator is manifested in what sometheologians call *Common Grace* which is participatory and *Christomorphic*, seen in the way and ministry of Christ as the Creator of all things, as stated in the New Testament and rooted in the Old Testament (Stassen & Gushee, 2013). The Common Grace that is freely given to everyone applies in all areas of human life, from birth to death, as well as in the joys and sorrows of life, work, and even politics (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8). Eating and drinking and rejoicing in one's labor are the work of God's hands and the enjoyment is also due to God's grace (Ecclesiastes 2:24-

25). Therefore, this common grace must be responded to with gratitude and obedience to God's commands and not for naïve hedonistic-individualist enjoyment. Otherwise, human life will be corrupted by the pursuit of physical gratification. If left unchecked, the human heart will be full of intentions to do evil (Ecclesiastes 8:11). The kingdom of God is the totality of a believer's life that goes beyond the physical realm and needs and can only be attained by knowing God and living in Christ (Gulo & Hendi, 2022).

Third, another ethical value of the Kingdom of God that Ecclesiastes teaches in this passage is that as the Creator, God is sovereign to determine the course of mortal human life in this world. Humans should not blame God for the bad luck that befalls them from time to time, instead, humans must be responsible for their actions and not look for excuses to justify themselves (Ecclesiastes 7:29), as shown by many religious believers today who often forget God's power and instead blame God. For this reason, the interpretation of Theodicy, namely that God always means well by allowing human suffering, is important in interpreting this passage. Therefore, every person should fear God as the Creator of all things and faithfully adhere to His commandments in every life experience on an ongoing basis (Ecclesiastes 12:13). The Kingdom of God has a correlation with discipleship in that a disciple of Christ is a citizen of the Kingdom of God, who submits under the rule of God and does His will on this earth, and fulfills Christ's Great Commission command (Matthew 28:19-20) to make disciples of the nations despite many challenges, sufferings, and persecutions. He promises that He will be with His people until the End of Time.

God as the Authority of Life

The existence of God as the Sovereign Master of human life is often a source of frustration in one's life. For most people, God is perceived as if He has ordained the tedious circle of life. Every day God gives the children of men laborious work but it is all vanity and catching the wind (Ecclesiastes. 1:13,14), for everything is in God's hands (Ecclesiastes. 9:1) and all things are subject to God's decree (Lasater, 2020). Human beings living on this earth have the same time and fate as animals who will one day die and return to dust (Ecclesiastes 3:18-20). Regarding the statement in the Book of Ecclesiastes, Seow says that the phrase "all things are vain" does not mean that all things are insignificant. It implies the message that everything is beyond human comprehension (Seow, 1997). Seow's emphasis points to two truths: God's absolute authority over life and human limitations.

As the Master of Life, every human being should realize that no one can live his life outside of God's will and design. In its hermeneutic idea, the Book of Ecclesiastes is a book that opposes the doctrine of retribution (if one lives righteously, one will receive a reward, if one does not live righteously, one will receive punishment) in a clear way and explains that human life does not depend on the circle of wisdom systematization, but is completely in the power of God because God's life and work cannot be perfectly explained in terms of a certain wisdom structure (Roper & Groenewald, 2013). It is this understanding that readers need to grasp in investigating the Book of Ecclesiastes as a whole. Those who do not understand this and the ethical value of God as the Master of Life will soon experience frustration and disappointment in life. On the contrary, those who realize this will be grateful to God. Furthermore, the implementation of this truth is:

First, the existence of God as the Power Holder as revealed by the Book of Ecclesiastes needs to be realized in the form of obedience to worship God, namely by realizing that the mortal life of man is in the hands of God's power and is only a "handful of breath" (Ecclesiastes. 3:21). Man should worship God with humility, reverence, and fear and obey His commandments, worshiping not just by offering sacrifices which Ecclesiastes considers foolish for not realizing his sins (Ecclesiastes. 4:17). In addition, Ecclesiastes also teaches that man needs to guard his tongue or words before God. This is important because there is a God in heaven who hears and man should fear Him (Ecclesiastes. 5:1,6). The Apostle James emphasized that a

worshipful person is characterized by the ability to restrain his tongue (James 1:26) and true worship touches the social aspect of caring for widows and orphans and keeping oneself from being polluted by the world (James 1:27).

Secondly, another ethical value of the Kingdom of God revealed in the Book of Ecclesiastes in this section is the attitude towards wealth and property (Ecclesiastes. 5:7-19). The practice of oppression of the rulers against the poor or the politics of oppression occurred during the time of Solomon as well as the practice of corruption, collusion, and nepotism at every level of office both concerning the distribution of power and tribute, and also became the focus of Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes. 5: 7-8) (Bullock, 2003). To anticipate this, Ecclesiastes gives an overview of the dangers of the "love of money" where "those who love money and wealth will never be satisfied with either and it is a vain thing" (Ecclesiastes. 5:9), as well as wealth that increases will quickly run out (Ecclesiastes. 5:10). Ironically, the rich often have trouble sleeping even compared to a mere employee who can generally sleep well (Ecclesiastes 5:11). There is even wealth that the owner keeps that becomes an accident to himself and he eventually falls into poverty (Ecclesiastes. 5:12-13).

For this reason, Ecclesiastes reminds his readers that man is born naked and dies with nothing (Ecclesiastes 5:14). Through this man is made aware not to labor in the pursuit of wealth which is ultimately an effort to catch the wind (Ecclesiastes 5:15), instead a lot of distress, sadness, suffering, and frustration is experienced by humans who pursue wealth in vain (Ecclesiastes 5:16). The right attitude is for man to simply enjoy what he can eat and drink as part of the grace of God, the Lord of this life, including in the case of enjoying the wealth granted by God, the Lord (Ecclesiastes 5:17-18; 6:1-2). For this reason, man needs to avoid complacency (Ecclesiastes 6:7). Henry gives an insight into wealth in Ecclesiastes Chapter 5 saying that all wealth (especially gold and silver) is "unsatisfying (5:9), unprofitable (5:10), disturbing (5:11,16), painful and destructive (5:12), will perish (5:13), must be abandoned after death (5:14,15) and is very likely to cause evil in man (Henry, 2016).

Third, the church needs to be aware of the "*materialism paradigm trap*", which is triggered by the sophistication of technology and the swift flow of information in the millennial era (Kariarta, 2020). This materialist paradigm has resulted in people living in the last days tending to be selfish (self-love) and love money, not caring about religion, living according to their lusts (hedonists), and having dilapidated morals (2 Timothy 3: 1-9). The church often forgets that God is the Lord of life. For this reason, the church, especially the digital generation, urgently needs to be made aware to maintain their faith and worship God, as the Lord of their lives and be aware of the trap of materialism, and being selfish. Christians should bring the fruits of kindness (Christian Charity) to others as shown in the life of the early church. Although it is realized that good deeds can change with the changing times, a moral system, a level of civilization, and also socio-economic development (Bykov, 2015). However, as followers of Christ, we must always be reminded to return to our sacred calling, to bring the Kingdom of God on earth by being 'salt and light' to all people in this world.

God as the Unfathomable Wisdom

King Solomon in his sermon sees wisdom over foolishness, as light over darkness (2:13). However, the fate of the wise and the foolish is the same, and this too is vanity (Ecclesiastes 2:14-15). Even the day of misfortune is made by God so that man will not become proud and remember the greatness of God who is the owner of all things and who has the best plan for this mortal human life (Ecclesiastes 7:14).

In addition, wisdom can make one's life successful, but, unfortunately, the benefits or fruits of the labor of one who has labored with wisdom, skill, and knowledge end up being enjoyed by one who has not labored for it, which is also a great waste and misfortune (Ecclesiastes 2:21). Instead, the heap of sinners is given to those who are acceptable to God (Ecclesiastes 2:24).

Therefore, man should recognize that the ways of the Lord are miraculous and the works of God who does all things are difficult for a man to understand (Ecclesiastes 11:5). Life itself is a mystery and that which is beyond the knowledge and reach of human wisdom belongs to God, the Master of unfathomable wisdom. It is to Him that man should give honor, praise, and worship.

As an implementation, *First*, believers need to recognize the greatness and omnipotence of God, as the *Source of Wisdom*. In His wisdom, God has designed the best and most beautiful life for the lives of His people, beyond all advances in science and technology (IPTEK). The digital generation needs to realize that even the most advanced technology will not be able to match God's unfathomable wisdom. Likewise, believers need to realize that there is a divine power in their lives that always guards, protects, and longs to bring out the best in everyone according to His glorious and eternal plan (Tidball, 1996). Thus, believers do not forget themselves, put aside and forget God and replace God by deifying science and technology. In today's world of instability and accelerated technological advancements, Christians should make room for God in their vision of life to find the true meaning of life (Keefer, 2019). Through an attitude of dependence on God as the Source of Wisdom, God remains the only exalted Person. The kingdom of God is present and exists in the history of human life, therefore Christians must have an awareness of God's presence in history so that they can actively build the kingdom of God progressively and constructively (Mamahit, 2000).

Secondly, the church in this digital age is called to live a quality of life as a citizen of the kingdom of God. The phrase "fear of God" in the Book of Ecclesiastes is closely related to ethics expressed by obedience to God's law (Bornape, 2018). In carrying out its mission in this world, the church remains in line with God's word and becomes a blessing to the world, namely as 'salt and light' of the world (Matthew 5: 13-16). The church can define its identity and quality of life when it realizes the existence of God, the unfathomable Source of Wisdom, involved in the journey of the church's life on this earth, especially answering all the suffering of life, disease, and death due to sin faced by humans in all ages. The church in the digital age should remain a true disciple of Christ by maintaining the values of life as a citizen of the kingdom of God and returning to its true calling of being His redeemed people who should rejuvenate Christ, as the only true Creator, Ruler, and Source of Wisdom.

Billy Graham at the Lausanne Congress in Switzerland on July 16, 1974, while addressing more than two thousand evangelical Christian leaders, asserted that the preaching of the Gospel should expand the kingdom of God, not Christian Nationalism (mixing a particular culture, political system, or country with the Christian faith) which threatens world evangelization. He then proclaimed himself as an ambassador of God's work and not of the United States, as he preached the Gospel to the world. Here Graham emphasizes the supernatural Kingdom of God that should not be mixed with any political system, culture, or country (Turek, 2016).

Thirdly, the church needs to be invited to rely on God's wisdom through the work of the cross and the Gospel, which the world considers foolishness (1Corinthians 1:18). In his interpretation of the Book of Ecclesiastes to "evangelize" the Gospel, Ortlund says that God's way of dealing with people under the sun is based on grace (Ecclesiastes 9:7,9), not on human merit or hard work. Although there is no mention of forgiveness of sins or sacrifices in the verse, the basic proposition of God's mercy is the same as His grace (Ortlund, 2013). Therefore, in living life in this world, the church must re-live the grace and forgiveness of sins done by Christ on Golgotha and its identity as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17) and be filled with the Holy Spirit to realize sin, righteousness and God's sovereign judgment (John 16:8).

In this postmodern and post-truth era, the church tends to prioritize theory over practice, hence the need for a new paradigm that reflects the love of the Triune God (Jun, 2014). Although it is not easy, the church is called to consistently uphold the truth of the Bible and demonstrate

the values of the Kingdom of God, the Source of Wisdom with full awareness, humility, and a testimony of faith in today's digital era. The church needs to be taught the values of the kingdom of God related to ethics starting from within the Christian family and spreading to society (Tanhidy et al., 2021). The church must consistently carry out its mission by developing a sense of justice and social concern within the Christian family and church community as one family in Christ to unite to serve God and become a channel of blessing for others, where the church is present to bring social justice to people who are deprived such as the poor and widows, both within the church as the Body of Christ and in the wider community. Religious Christians develop themselves strongly in religious (rather than secular) cultures to be able to elevate their religious beliefs into social values (Sedikides & Gebauer, 2021). In this way, the mission of the church can grow consistently as the Great Commission of Christ is carried out with God's wisdom demonstrated through the actions of believers in relating to fellow believers and society in the wider social sphere.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Kingdom of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes is understood inclusively-exclusively as God's eternal rule over His people through General Revelation, General Grace, and in the Person of Jesus Christ (Special Revelation), which is expressed through the attributes of God who rules this world as the Creator, the Holder of the Power of Life, the incomprehensible Wisdom that designs, maintains and protects the lives of His people. The ethical values of the Kingdom of God above are realized and implemented in the daily attitudes and actions of His people as citizens of the Kingdom of God, including anticipating the challenges of religious radicalism, realizing common grace, obeying worship to God, not loving money, avoiding the trap of materialism, not deifying technology, being salt and light for this world and consistently carrying out the mission of preaching the Gospel of Christ in this world on an ongoing basis as citizens of His Kingdom.

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