

Easy As 1-2-3



Romans 4¹

It's As Easy As 1-2-3

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Overall Understanding

Chapter Four²

For some, Romans 4 is a bit of a blur. Some might be tempted to read through it just to get to the next chapter. But some very important theological points are made by Paul.

As he has thus far, so he continues to emphasize the point that righteousness is not through circumcision or keeping the law, but by believing in God. He gives two witnesses to this point: Abraham and David.

What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? ²For if Abraham were justified (remember “justified” means “made righteous”) by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

Another way of putting this is that Abraham’s works were good. He could boast in them, but not before God. What God responded to was Abraham’s faith.

¹ C. D. Hildebrand

² Scripture taken from KJV, Public Domain, by the time I realized this was in KJV, it would have been too difficult to change it, so I kept it.

³For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

The reason Abraham was righteous, was because He believed God's promise to him.

⁴Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.

When we work, we get a salary. That is not a gift, but a debt paid to us for our work. Grace is a gift. By definition, it is unmerited.

⁵But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth (makes righteous) the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

This means exactly what it says. The one who does not work for righteousness but simply believes in the one who makes an ungodly person righteous, his faith is all the "payment" he needs to be considered righteous.

⁶Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,

Now, Paul's second witness, David, is brought in, who also wrote about such righteousness.

⁷Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

David was speaking from experience, but he also prophesied. Our sins are forgiven.

⁹Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.

Paul is speaking again of righteousness apart from the law, which circumcision represented. The righteousness imparted to Abraham was given by faith BEFORE he was circumcised. So it isn't by circumcision/keeping the law that a person is made righteous.

¹¹ And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also:

Abraham's circumcision didn't make him righteous. It was proof that he already was righteous. We might compare this to baptism. Baptism doesn't save anyone. It is evidence that we have already been saved.

In being declared righteous before he was circumcised and also being circumcised, he became the father of both groups, the Jew and the Gentile.

¹² And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

The Gentiles did not practice circumcision. They are made righteous by faith.

¹³ For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

Abraham was not under the Law of Moses as it had not yet been given. So, the promise to his seed was not through the law, but through Abraham's faith.

¹⁴ For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

He is being straightforward here. If one could be righteous by keeping the law, then faith was not necessary, and no promise was needed.

¹⁵ Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

Consider a sign that reads, "Stay off the grass," followed by the numbers that make it illegal. You stay off the grass. But if there is no such law, you may go on the grass...the very same grass. If there is no law that says you may not eat certain foods, then eating them is not a sin.

¹⁶Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, ¹⁷(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

It is by grace through faith that we are saved. It is by grace through faith that we live as BELIEVERS. It is not by law for either one.

God quickens the dead and calls those things which are not as though they were. This is now referring to the faith Abraham had. God told him to sacrifice Isaac. But Abraham believed that God would raise him from the dead.

¹⁸Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

The idea that he would have a son with Sarah looked hopeless. But they believed God would do it anyway.

¹⁹And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

Abraham obviously knew he and Sarah were too old to have children. He was nearly 100 years old. Even so, he believed the promise.

²⁰He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

²¹And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

Abraham did not withdraw from God's promise through unbelief. He was completely convinced that what God had promised, He was able/was powerful to do.

²²And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Some versions say "accounted to him" as if to imply giving him credit, and this is close. The only reason that God imputed righteousness was that He believed.

James writes that Abraham was made righteous by his works. But Paul is arguing the opposite. (There was a dispute between them, even though many theologians have tried to smooth this over.) Paul would say it was Abraham's imputed righteousness that caused his obedience. That his righteousness was purely by faith. That faith led him to obey. This is the only truth that prevails. We are not made righteous because we obey or work, but because we believe. Otherwise, as Paul has already said, it is no longer grace but a wage.

²³ Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;
²⁴ But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead:

Paul is saying all of that for our benefit. We also, both Jew and Gentile, are made righteous by faith, not by following the law, not by works.

"For it is by grace (gift) you have been saved through FAITH, and that NOT of yourselves, it is the GIFT of God, not of works lest anyone should boast." Ephesians 2:8-9

²⁵ Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Jesus died to pay for our penalty for sin, which was death. He took on death for us. He was raised again for our righteousness. If we BELIEVE in His resurrection, we are saved.

- If you are interested in studying further the debate of works vs. faith righteousness and the rift between Paul and James, [consider our notes on the book of James](#). Here we discuss the Biblical timeline and the evidence that the early church was not at first aware that believers are no longer under the law.

Coming Up in Chapter 5

One of the most clear statements concerning faith-righteousness, is in Chapter 5, Paul brings it all into view.

We see the marvelous provisions of our faith-righteousness.

He explains how it was that man came in need of salvation.

It is here that we see the distinction between sinners and the righteous.