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Minot, ND  
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# The Epistle of Romans

The Justification of the Ungodly

Chapter 3 Verses 27-31

There are two important terms that we must learn. They are formal and material principle. See the differences below:

Formal Principle: the authoritative figure or book that a person, church, or denomination follows.

Material Principle: the central teaching or the main focus of a person's, church's, or denomination's formal principle.

So, for example, the formal principle of Mormons is Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. For Muslims, it is the Koran and Muhammed. And for us Christians, it should be the Bible and Jesus!

But what about the 'material principle?' This is where a great many Christian churches disagree. That is to say; what is the main thing that should be focused on in a local church. What is the central teaching that the church should return to as the 'bread and butter' of the church? Obviously, for the Christians in Rome, they held to the Torah (Torah – the Word of the Old Testament). However, did they hold to a Torah of

works or a Torah of faith? Paul's argument in verse 27 is that the material principle is not 'works' but 'faith.'

With this in mind, let's take a moment and examine the formal and material principle. For example, what is the authoritative source of your theology? Where do you derive your theology from?

- Self; What Feels Right
- Past Experiences
- The Bible
- Traditions of the Church
- Pragmatism; whatever works
- Popular Opinion • Reason/Mind
- Republican/Democrat Talking Points
- Preacher (i.e., local or TV)
- Local Cultural Norms
- Historic Christian Leader

And what about the material principle?

What is your central doctrine and focus?

- End Times
- Creationism
- Victorious Living
- Christ Crucified
- Social Activism
- Gifts of the Spirit
- God's 10 Commandments
- Evangelism
- God's Sovereignty
- Pious Living
- God's Love
- Perfect Sanctification
- Other

So, back to Romans 3:27-31, when Paul distinguishes between the Torah of *works* versus the Torah of *faith*, what he is revealing is that the Old Testament (Torah) is not primarily about demands for works to morally climb to God but a promise of a gift by faith. That is to say, the Old Testament is not primarily about teaching us how to behave (ethics) but is primarily about teaching us a promise to be believed. And what is that promise? **Christ** is the promise and goal of the Torah! The target at which the Old Testament points is Jesus! Therefore, churches and well-meaning Christians that do not primarily focus on Christ are not only misreading the Bible but are missing the material principle of Scripture! And if you have the correct formal principle and miss the primary material principle, well... you can become 'Christian' in name only. It is always Christ and Him Crucified! (See 1 Corinthians 15:3-ff; Luke 24:27; John 5:39; Acts 10:43; Acts 28:23; Luke 24:44; John 20:31.)



