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No Difference in God's Sight

Definitions in **bold letters** are from **Strong's** Exhaustive Concordance
Other definitions are from **Webster's** Dictionary, 1828 /1913 Edition
or Roget's Thesaurus - **November 8, 2015**

Acts 15:1-12

Introduction: Basic to understanding the Bible is **making distinctions** between various covenants found in Scripture. To fail to do so leads not only to confusion but also to incorrect conclusions concerning certain commands found in God's Word.

While the covenants found in different parts of the Bible have certain similarities, there are also marked differences. Jeremiah foretold that a **New Covenant** was **coming** (Jer. 31:31-34). Contrasting old and new covenants, Hebrews 8:7 declares, "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second."

The above being true means that features found in the old covenant were not automatically transferred to the new. A number of commands found in the Old Testament are repeated in the New Testament, such as various moral teachings, many of them were actually strengthened (cf. Matt. 5:17-48b).

The **rituals** of the **old covenant** are **not binding** on **New Testament believers**, however. This was at the heart of the controversy facing the Christian church in Acts 15.
(Source: *The Bible Expositor and Illuminator*, Union Press Publication-Christian Life Series)

Acts 15:1, And *CERTAIN MEN* which came down from Judaea **taught the brethren**, and said, Except ye be **circumcised** after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Thought 1. AD. 50 was the year for the events of Acts 15:1-35. This is about 9 years after Peter was sent to preach to Cornelius and 21 years after the day of Pentecost events.
(Source: *The Reese Chronological Bible*, pages 1443-1446, 1487-1489)

NOTE: And certain men - These were undoubtedly men who had been **Jews**, but who were now converted to Christianity. The fact that they were willing to refer the matter in **dispute** to the apostles and elders Acts 15:2 shows that they had professedly embraced the Christian religion. The account which follows is a record of the first **internal dissension** which occurred in the Christian church. Hitherto the church had been struggling against **external foes**. Violent persecutions had raged, and had fully occupied the attention of Christians. But now the churches were at peace. They enjoyed great external prosperity in Antioch, and the great enemy of souls took occasion then, as he has often done in similar circumstances since, to **excite contentions** in the church itself, so that when external violence could not destroy it, an effort was made to secure the same object by **internal dissension** and **strife**. This history, therefore, is particularly important, as it is the record of the first unhappy debate which arose in the bosom of the church. It is further important, as it **shows** the **manner** in which such **controversies** were **settled** in apostolic times, and as it established some very important principles respecting the perpetuity of the religious rites of the Jews.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

NOTE: taught the brethren; the **Gentile converts** at **Antioch**, who are styled "**brethren**", though they were Gentiles, because they were regenerated by the grace of God, and were of the same FAITH with the BELIEVING Jews, and in the same church state with them at Antioch: and said,

except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses; or custom of Moses, which had been used from the time of Abraham, and was revived and reinforced by Moses; wherefore the Syriac version renders it, "the law of Moses"; See Gill on John 7:19.

ye cannot be saved; these men were not only for **retaining circumcision**, which was now abolished, but they made it necessary to salvation; which was carrying the matter further than even the **unbelieving Jews** themselves did, at least some of them: for though indeed it is a notion with them, that no circumcised persons go to hell, but are all saved; and some of them say, that God rejects uncircumcised persons, and brings them down to hell Shemot Rabba, sect. 19. fol. 104. 4.; yet others of them speak of the godly among the nations of the world, and of the proselytes of the gate, who keep the **seven precepts of Noah, as persons that shall be saved;** so Ananias the Jew, preceptor to King Izates, when he signified his great desire to be circumcised, in order to put him off of it, told him, that if he was determined to follow the customs of the Jews, he might worship God without circumcision, which was more peculiar to the Jews than to be circumcised Joseph. Antiqu. l. 20. c. 2. sect. 5. .

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/geb/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Thought 2. Even today, there is DIVISION in the body of Christ about what God requires for a person to be saved. The question is such a point of contention, entire Denominations have arisen because of the difference in beliefs about this topic. So, what's really the truth?

Acts 15:2, *When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small DISSENSION and DISPUTATION with them...*

Dissension, disagreement in opinion, usually a disagreement which is violent, producing WARM debates or angry words; STRIFE; discord; quarrel.

Disputation 4803, mutual questioning, i.e. discussion:-- reasoning.

*...they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should **go up** to Jerusalem unto the **apostles** and **elders** about **this question.***

NOTE: In this place it clearly denotes that there was **earnest** and **warm discussion;** but it is not implied that there was any improper heat or temper on the part of Paul and Barnabas. Important principles were to be settled in regard to the organization of the church. Doctrines were advanced by the **Judaizing teachers** which were false, and which tended to produce great **disorder** in the church. Those doctrines were urged with zeal, were declared to be essential to salvation, and would therefore tend to **distract** the minds of Christians, and to produce great anxiety. It became, therefore, necessary to meet them with a **determined purpose**, and to **establish** the **truth** on an immovable basis. And the case shows that it is right to "CONTEND earnestly for the FAITH" Jude 1:3; and, when similar cases occur, that it is proper to resist the approach of error with all the arguments which may be at our command, and with all the weapons which truth can furnish. It is further implied here that it is the **DUTY** of the **ministers** of the gospel to **defend** the **truth** and to **oppose error.** Paul and Barnabas regarded themselves as set for this purpose (compare Philemon 1:17, "Knowing that I am set for the defense of the gospel"); and Christian ministers should be qualified to defend the truth, and should be willing with a proper spirit and with great earnestness to **maintain** the **doctrines revealed.**

They determined - There was no prospect that the controversy would be settled by contention and argument. It would seem, from this statement, that those who came down from Judea were also **willing** that the whole matter should be referred to the apostles at Jerusalem. The reason for this may have been:

(1) That Jerusalem would be regarded by them as the **source** of **authority** in the Christian church, as it had been among the Jews.

(2) most of the apostles and the most experienced Christians were there. They had listened to the instructions of Christ himself; had been long in the church; and were supposed to be better acquainted with its design and its laws.

(3) those who came from **Judea** would not be likely to **acknowledge** the **authority** of **Paul** as an **apostle**: the authority of those at Jerusalem they would recognize.

(Source: <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Thought 1. Notice that even though **Paul** had been preaching for **13 years**, he didn't quite know how to convince them of the truths he knew in regard to this question. So, he and others go to Jerusalem to discuss it with the apostles and elders. We see he was **WILLING** to do what God's wisdom says do in his effort to **WORK** toward **UNITY** in what's believed and taught in the body of Christ.

Acts 15:3-4, *And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, **declaring** the **conversion** of the **Gentiles**: and they caused **great JOY** unto all the brethren. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the **apostles** and **elders**, and they declared all things that God **had DONE** with them.*

NOTE: Being brought on their way by the church. A special escort of church members attended them on their journey. It was mark of honor. See Acts 20:38 and Acts 21:5.

Passed through Phenice. Phoenicia. They went by the land route, visiting the churches of Phoenicia and Samaria, causing great joy by their account of so great success among the Gentiles. **Were received of the church.** Had a cordial reception, a warm greeting.

(Source: <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/pnt/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Acts 15:5, *But there rose up certain of the **sect** of the **Pharisees** which **believed**, saying, That it was needful to **circumcise** them, and to command them to KEEP the law of **Moses**.*

NOTE: But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees - This verse appears to be part of the declaration made by Paul and Barnabas to this council: for, having stated how God blessed their ministry among the Gentiles, they proceed to declare how all the good work was likely to be destroyed by certain Pharisees, who, having received the **Christian FAITH**, came down to Antioch, and began to teach the necessity of circumcision, etc., and thus filled the **minds** of the young converted Gentiles with doubtful disputations.

(Source: <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/acc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Acts 15:6, *And the **apostles** and **elders** **came together** for to **consider** of this matter.*

NOTE: And the apostles and elders ... - They **CAME TOGETHER** in accordance with the authority in Matthew 18:19-20. It would seem, also, that the whole church was convened on this occasion, and that the church concurred, at least, in the judgment expressed in this case. See Acts 15:12, Acts 15:22-23.

For to consider of this matter - Not to decide it arbitrarily, or even by authority, without deliberation; but to compare their views, and to express the result of the whole to the church at Antioch. It was a grave and difficult question, deeply affecting the entire constitution of the Christian church, and they therefore solemnly engaged in deliberation on the subject.

(Source: <http://www.studyight.org/commentaries/bnb/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Acts 15:7, *And when there had been much disputing (**mutual questioning, i.e. discussion: reasoning**), Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the **Gentiles** by my mouth should **hear** the word of the gospel, and **BELIEVE**.*

NOTE: Peter here has reference to the events related in Acts 10, where is recorded the conversion of Cornelius. Peter at that time had acted in good faith, **baptizing** Cornelius and his household **without any thought** of circumcision and law-keeping; but it is evident that the cunning Pharisees, in efforts to bring them all to their viewpoint, began by stressing the social issue of eating with the uncircumcised, but moving quickly afterward to the hard position of demanding full obligations to Moses' law as a condition of salvation. True, Peter had eaten with Cornelius; but, through **social pressure**, the Pharisee-Christians were able to compromise him by causing his dissimulation (hypocrisy). When all were gathered together in Jerusalem, and after many discussions, Peter's basic understanding of **God's will**, fortified by his **rugged character**, **enabled him to rise up**, as he did here, and pull the rug out from under the whole Pharisaical conspiracy.
(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Acts 15:8-9, And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And **put no difference** between US and THEM, **purifying** their **hearts by FAITH**.

NOTE: And God, which knoweth the hearts - implying that the state of the heart before God is the real test of one's **rightful standing** in the visible Church; and though this cannot be certainly known to men, no principle can be sound which goes in the face of it. Bare them witness, giving them the Holy Spirit, even as he did unto us - (Acts 10:44.) And put NO DIFFERENCE between us and them, purifying their hearts **by faith**. Whereas "the **uncircumcision** of the **flesh**" of those **Gentile converts** was regarded by the zealots as rendering them 'unclean,' Peter says, that God, in "purifying their hearts **by faith**," had **abolished** that outward distinction between Jew and Gentile, making both ONE in Christ.
(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/jfu/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Acts 15:10, Now therefore why **tempt ye (entice [draw on])** God, to put a **yoke** upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

NOTE: Now therefore why tempt (or 'try') ye God - standing in the way of His demonstrated purpose,
To put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? This, as has been already remarked, was not the yoke of mere burdensome ceremonies, but of an **obligation** to fulfill "**the whole law**," to which everyone became "**debtor**" who was circumcised (Galatians 5:1-3)...
(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/jfu/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Galatians 5:1-6, Stand fast therefore in the **liberty** wherewith Christ hath made **US FREE**, and be not entangled again with the **yoke of bondage**. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye **be circumcised**, Christ shall PROFIT YOU NOTHING. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a **debtor** to do the **whole law**. **Christ** is become of **no effect** unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness **by faith**. For IN Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but **FAITH** which **worketh by love**.

Romans 2:28-29, For he is NOT a Jew, which is one **outwardly**; neither is that **circumcision**, which is outward in the **flesh**: But he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the **heart (MIND)**, IN the **SPIRIT**, and **NOT** in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Acts 15:11, But we **believe** that through the **GRACE (favor [kindness granted])** of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall **be SAVED**, even as they.

NOTE: Through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved - This seems to be an answer to an objection, "Has not God designed to save us, the Jews, by an observance of the law; and them, the Gentiles, by the faith of the Gospel?" **No: for we Jews can be saved no other way than through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ;** and this is the way in which the Gentiles in question have been saved. There is but ONE WAY of salvation **for Jews** and Gentiles, the grace, mercy, or **favor** coming by and through the Lord Jesus, the Christ; this is now fully opened to the Gentiles; and we believe we shall be saved in the same way.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Thought 1. So, when we put together this entire conclusion, what he said is everybody is saved by GRACE through FAITH. Not by WORKS and not just "GRACE" by itself.

Ephesians 2:8-10, For by **GRACE** are ye **SAVED** **through FAITH**; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: **Not of WORKS**, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created IN Christ Jesus unto **good WORKS**, which God hath before **ordained** that we should **walk** in them.

James 2:14, What doth it **PROFIT**, my brethren, though a man say he hath **FAITH**, and have not WORKS? can **FAITH** **SAVE** him?

Faith defined 4102, persuasion, **Credence** (belief); **i.e. especially RELIANCE upon Christ for salvation.**

Save define 4982, "safe"); **to save**, **i.e. deliver or protect (lit. or fig.): -- heal, preserve, save (self), DO well, be (make) whole.**

Thought 2. This is the entire definition of the Greek word for "save." As you can see, there are a number of meanings from which to choose. Therefore, the question is which one, or ones FIT the scripture at which we are looking? Notice the question is about "PROFIT." Not about being "SAVED" unto LIFE.

James 2:15-18, If a brother or sister be **naked**, and **destitute** of daily **food**, And one of you SAY unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye **give** them **not** those things which are **needful** to the body; what doth it **profit (benefit)?** Even so **faith**, if it hath not **WORKS**, is **DEAD** (idle [doing nothing], being alone. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast **faith**, and I have **works**: SHEW me thy **FAITH** **without** thy **works**, and I will **SHEW** thee my **FAITH** **BY** my **WORKS**.

NOTE: The appeal of James is clear and logical. We can't "SEE" someone's faith, but we can see their WORKS. You can't SEE faith without works, but you can demonstrate the **reality of faith by WORKS.**

(Source: David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible classic.studylight.org/com/guz)

James 2:19-20, Thou **believest** that there is one God; thou **DOEST well**: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou **KNOW**, O vain man, that **FAITH** without **works** is **DEAD** (idle [inactive; doing nothing])?

Thought 3. Again, he acknowledges their salvation in Christ and that they have done what is "morally good": believing that there is one God. But the devils also believe the same truth. And just like Christians who are not PROFITING anybody by putting their **FAITH** to **WORK**, the demons are not helping anybody either! However, salvation is only for humans, so "BELIEF" by the demons cannot help them by making them creatures of life: new creations. They remain void of life.

James 2:21-26, Was not Abraham our father **justified** (**SHOW just; righteous**) by **WORKS**, when he had **OFFERED** Isaac his son upon the altar? Ye **SEE** then how that by **works** a man is **justified** (**SHOW righteous**), and not by **faith** only. Likewise

also was not **Rahab** the harlot **justified (SHOW righteous)**, by **WORKS**, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is **dead** (IDLE [doing nothing]), so **FAITH** without **WORKS** is **dead** (idle [doing nothing]) also.

Thought 4. He wraps up his point about Christians should do works that SHOW they have faith by reminding them of how Rahab the prostitute “SHOWED” the faith she had. Again, we’re ordained unto, not saved by, good works (Eph. 2:10).

1 John 3:23, And this is his commandment, That we should **BELIEVE** on the **name** of his Son Jesus Christ, and **LOVE** one another, AS he gave us commandment.

Acts 15:12, *Then all the multitude **kept silence**, and **gave audience** to **Barnabas and Paul**, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.*

NOTE: Then all the multitude kept silence,.... Upon this oration of Peter's, there was a profound silence in the whole assembly, among all the brethren of the church, who were come together on this occasion; they were all satisfied with, and by their silence **acquiesced** (to assent to, upon conviction, agree) in, what Peter said; and waited to hear what might be further said about this matter, by other persons in the assembly... **and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul; declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them;** ...miracles in nature were wrought for the confirmation of the Gospel, such as the striking blind **Elymas** the sorcerer, at Paphos in Cyprus, and curing the cripple at Lystra; and which they ascribe not to themselves but to God, whose **instruments** they only were.

(Source: <http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/geb/view.cgi?bk=ac&ch=15#1>)

Acts 15:13-20, *And after they had held their peace, **James** answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: hearken unto me: **Simeon** hath declared how God at the first did **visit** the **Gentiles**, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this **agree** the **words** of the **prophets**; as it is **WRITTEN**, After this I will return, and will build again the **tabernacle** of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and **all** the **Gentiles**, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all **his works** from the **BEGINNING** of the world.*

*Wherefore **my sentence is**, that we **trouble not them**, which from among the **Gentiles** are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.*

Thought 1. The Holy Spirit inspired this to be written so we could **LEARN** key truths that will help us **KNOW** God’s mind about this topic and solve future questions that arise as we live as Christians. They came to know the truth because they **CAME TOGETHER** to look at the matter to find the **TRUTH**. They used what God had DONE and what God had inspired to be WRITTEN. If we Do like they did, it will cause us to speak the same thing and have no divisions among us.

Now, we know when we can’t reason from the scriptures and discern God’s **MIND**, his Spirit will lead us look at what he’s **DONE**, because he’ll never violate his **WORD**. Even scripture tells us that he’s KNOWN by the **GOOD** things he’s DONE.

Psalms 9:16, The **LORD** is **KNOWN** by the **judgment (RIGHT, justice)** which he executeth...

1 Corinthians 1:10, Now I beseech you, **BRETHREN**, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all **speak** the **same thing**, and that there be **no divisions** among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.