

# BUT WE BELIEVE

By Bill Irby

“BUT WE BELIEVE...” Members of the church met in Jerusalem to face and solve a doctrinal problem. The problem was that certain men from Judea taught that “*Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved*” (Acts 15:1). This is, in capsule form, the teaching of the Judaizers. Scholars refer to them by this name because they sought to Judaize the church in a doctrinal sense. In many places it was already very Jewish in a cultural sense. The Bible offers no prohibition for this. But to be Jewish doctrinally was wrong. The Law of Moses had been taken out of the way and nailed to the cross of Christ (Matthew 5:17).

As one might well understand, the emotions associated with this conflict between sets of ideas ran high. Thus the elders and the apostles had to deal with the primary problem and associated matters with great care. This they did, as Acts 15 makes plain.

I would like for us to pay close attention to one verse, spoken by Peter, Acts 15:11: But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

Peter had already told the assembly that there was no difference between Jew and Gentile (v.9). He went on to say that Christians with a Jewish heritage should not even think about requiring that Gentiles keep the Law of Moses. After all, he said, the Law of Moses had denigrated into a set of creedal codes that “neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.”

I am stuck by the simple formulation of Acts 15:11. It is a summary statement about salvation. But it is not exclusive. It is a beautiful summary of the reliance we must have on Jesus Christ for our salvation. Nobody is saved without the unmerited favor of Jesus Christ. In this Jew and Gentile are identical (“even as they”).

Acts 15:11, however, does not exclude other statements about salvation in the New Testament. Acts 15:11 is truth, but that truth does not exclude these passages from being truth: We are saved by faith (Romans 5:1). Baptism saves us (Mark 16:16, 1 Peter 3:21, Romans 6:1-6, Galatians 3:26-28, etc.). Confession that Jesus is the Christ saves us (Romans 10:9-10). Calling on the name of the Lord, properly understood, saves us (Romans 10:13 and Acts 22:16). Repentance is a component of salvation (Acts 2:38, 3:19, Luke 13:3). Biblical salvation requires a life of faithfulness (Revelation 2:10, 2 Timothy 4:6-8).

So the statement in Acts 15:11 is not an exclusive statement of all there is associated with salvation. The other passages mentioned show that salvation comes when one obeys the gospel (Hebrews 5:8-9, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9) in response to God’s grace.

This is an important matter and we should tactfully and carefully raise it with our religious friends who practice the more popular forms of Christianity. Other forms of the Christian religion are more popular in our culture than simple New Testament Christianity because these forms have modified the religion to suit the inclinations and desires of modern people. Paul said it would happen, and it has (2 Timothy 4:2-4).

This takes me back to our passage in Acts. Peter did not use the word “believe” that way folks do today. For Peter, belief was knowledge revealed to him by God Himself. We have that knowledge in the Bible. Perhaps we would make better headway in reaching the lost of our world if we would learn enough Bible to state clearly to our friends and neighbors what we believe.