

APPEARANCE OR THE *Hidden Heart*

In our church Bible study, last Wednesday, we studied Jacob and Esau's choices of a wife (in Genesis 27:46-28:9). Jacob received spiritual guidance through his father, Isaac, married a descendant of Abraham, and was blessed by the Lord. Esau, wishing to be appreciated by his parents and perhaps hoping for the blessing of the Lord, decided, based on his own reasoning, to add to his two pagan wives and marry a daughter of Ismael, also a descendant of Abraham. Jacob's obedience was blessed; Esau's imitation of Jacob did him no good.

We wondered how many Christians (or imitation Christians) base their lives and choices on a "model" Christian family who are considered a "success". How many pastors or missionaries choose their methods and goals based on the evident "success" of other pastors or missionaries who are widely known and envied. A frightening (or encouraging?) evaluation is revealed to Samuel by the Lord: *"I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart"* (1 Samuel 16:7).

Last Sunday I had the joy of preaching again in the "church" where a Italian missionary and his wife have been working night and day for nine years, in the town to which they are convinced that God has called them, distributing Christian literature from door to door, organizing various types of special services, holding Bible studies in homes. They are "failures" by any human means of measurement, such as numbers attending (there were 15 present, including their family of four), building projects (none), baptisms, support (under-supported).

Later in the week I talked and prayed with another Italian missionary and his wife who, after 18 years of evangelization, home Bible studies, in a small city, are watching the small group they have formed fall apart under internal conflict. There are no crowds of missionaries coming to visit them and to copy their methods, no offers of others who would like to come and help.

And yet, the man who drove me to that Sunday Service had been a small child when I evangelized his family more than 40 years ago. His father and mother confessed the Lord and were baptized. The entire young family were faithful in church, but the father died, the mother married a man who divorced and left his family for her, the children were placed in an orphanage. I drove 30 miles to pick them up on Sunday mornings, bring them to church and Sunday School, have one of Maria Teresa's home-cooked Sunday dinners with us and our family, then took them back to the orphanage. Later, the mother took them back with her and we did not see them again for years. Now, he has come back to the Lord, been baptized and never misses a service, is a local director in a multi-national business. Has my investment of many days, hours and even years, in this family been a failure or a victory?

There is no empty drama in Paul's writing that we are engaged in a spiritual warfare. There are the timid, the fallen, the injured, and those whom God has graciously blessed (who may still be called "failures" by the world). Where ever Maria Teresa and I have gone to preach and teach, whatever we have written, whenever we have cried or prayed - NOT ONLY GOD, BUT YOU, TOO, WERE WITH US. We will count the results together in Heaven.

In Christ the Lord's service,

William (Bill) Standridge

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