

Changing Directions

From my mother I heard, “Straighten your face!” Other parents said, “You need to change your face!”

These were the strong words spoken when a child had worn a sad face too long or was simply pouting, a silent fit of anger. Have you ever wondered how effective this form of correction was? In other words, did this type of correction bring about the desired response? Was the parent who demanded a ‘straight face’ only interested in seeing a face that was not sad or angry, or was there a more noble desire? Did the parent really desire a change of heart?

Reflecting on my own ‘Straighten your face’ experiences, I have considered other disciplinary actions. I have asked myself:

- What is more important, a pleasant face, or a heart with the right attitude?
- Is it better to have acceptable behavior, or a heart that desires to do right?
- Should I teach my children to merely refrain from vulgar speech, or train their hearts to think pure thoughts?

I think we all understand that it is the attitude and disposition of the heart that affects one’s face, one’s behavior, and one’s speech. We all know and teach that Jesus desired a response from the heart, not simply external behaviors.

People can ‘fake’ the externals. People can put on a show by displaying a happy face, maintaining culturally acceptable behaviors, and acceptable speech. Yet, even with the outer display of goodness, the heart can be rotten.

Jesus rebuked the hypocritical Pharisees of his day saying:

**These people honor me with their lips,
but their hearts are far from me.
(Matthew 15:8—NIV)**

Parents, this is surely not the result we desire when we correct or discipline our children. We want their hearts to change.

- God wants people with changed hearts.
- Jesus wants people with changed hearts.
- Parents want children with changed hearts.

Did you know that that is what repentance is really all about!?

At the heart of the New Testament word ‘repentance’ is the idea of a ‘changed mind’ or ‘changed heart.’ God knew, and we intuitively know, that changed behavior without a changed heart is hypocritical. In contrast, a changed heart will result in changed behaviors. The changed behaviors are really the ‘fruit of repentance.’ Repentance is a heart response.

Whether we are correcting our children, or conversing with an unbeliever, or reflecting on our own lives, we must recognize that God desires the heart. We can demand behavioral changes; but even an animal trainer do that.

When the direction of the heart is changed, you can rest assured, the feet will follow.