

## Directions

“The directions were difficult” or “inadequate” or perhaps even “awful.” Been there, done that- we once purchased a product that came “some assembly required.” The directions/instructions were elaborate, detailed, and came in six languages... none of which were English! Then too, we’ve all likely received directions something along the lines of, “Well, you go quite a way (however far that is), and you’ll pass several houses (exactly how many no one including the direction-giver knows), then you’ll go over hill (what qualifies as a “hill” likely depends on one’s birthplace), and around big curve (ditto previous comment), and you’ll turn at the last road before the big Oak tree out in the pasture” (how do you know it’s the ‘last’ one unless you’ve passed it, and obviously a general knowledge of forestry is required). Yeah, that helped some none at all! Bad directions are a problem no doubt...

But there are also some people that are just bad at following (even good!) directions. One person I know quite well is left-handed. But here’s the thing: Unless she really thinks about it, her “right” hand is the one she writes with, which is her left hand. So, if my wife gives you directions, or gets them from you, be sure to emphasize the difference between your “right” and hers because they may not be the same! And there’s also this about directions: You have to first know where you are to follow them. The phone rings and the voice on the other end asks, “How do I get to your location?” To answer that question with any degree of specificity, THEY and YOU have first know where they are. And if the inquiring person isn’t good at directions, they may have no idea!

All of which leads us to this: **If salvation in Jesus Christ is the destination desired, the gospel has the directions to get us there. But:**

1. **We have to first know where we are.** “Lost in sin” and “heading toward eternal destruction” is right general answer, Rom.3:23; but specifics are required. “Do you believe that God exists?” OK, then proceed to “Do you believe the Bible is His inspired word?” 1Cor.2:10-13; Eph.3:3-5. OK good, then, “Do you trust ‘the map’ or will you insist on ‘going my way’ or ‘the way I/my family has always gone’ even if that won’t get you to where you need and say you want to be?” 1Cor.2:14; 1:18-25.
2. **Directions to any location are sequential.** This means that if we “miss a turn,” the rest of the directions won’t work until/unless we realize our mistake, and go back, make the right turn, and then proceed accordingly, cf. Acts 18:24-26. Additionally, “knowing where you are” and the concept of “sequential directions” also help to clear up some confusion regarding God’s directions to salvation in Christ. Different people were given different directions in the NT precisely because: a) they were in different *spiritual* locations; or, b) they were at different stages of progression through the directions. For instance, *believers* in Jesus as the Christ were not told “believe” on the Day of Pentecost as they had already reached that conclusion after listening to the gospel, cf. Acts 2:22-36, and “confessed” as much in v.37 (otherwise they wouldn’t have asked “*what shall we do?*”). Instead, they were told to “*Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,*” v.38. Also, note that they were NOT told to “Say the sinner’s prayer”- and neither was anyone else given such a direction to salvation in Christ anywhere in the NT, cp

1Thess.2:13! We can follow God's *directions* to salvation in Christ, or we can insist on "going my own way" or "the way my family has always gone," but only ONE WAY gets us to where we need to be, John 14:6; Mark 16:15-16.

3. **Sometimes we have to *backtrack* and *course correct*.** Since directions are sequential, if we "miss a step" the rest of the instructions become pointless. If we don't really "believe" (cf. Heb.11:6 where *knowledge in the mind, trust in the heart, and obedience in the life* is included), then being baptized means you just got wet. I've never liked the term "re-baptized" because: a) if it was done "right" the first time and for the right reason (based on true faith/belief and for the remission of sins), it needs never be redone, cf. 1John 1:9 (this book was written to Christians, 2:1); and, b) if it wasn't done right, it wasn't "baptism" in the first place, and thus can't be redone. The same type "backtracking" and "correcting before proceeding" can also be applied to repentance. "Repentance" is a change of mind and heart that leads to a change in direction and course. So, even if we truly believe and are baptized for the right reason, but don't really change our minds and hearts about the course and direction of our past life enough to follow the directions and course God prescribes for a new life in Christ, we wind up right back where we started- which is lost in sin, cf. Acts 8:12-23!

Typically, well-written directions are not hard to follow if: 1) we know where we are and start progressing accordingly; 2) understand the sequential order inherent in them; and, 3) are willing to admit a mistake and go back to where we "missed the turn" and FOLLOW THE DIRECTIONS! Certainly, our Creator, Sustainer, and Savior are able to write such directions, and did so, in the New Testament. Read it. Understand it. Follow it. Such will lead you to eternal life. Or conversely, "go your own way" and God's Word tells you where you wind up also, "*those who perish, because they did not receive the love of truth so as to be saved,*" 2Thess.2:10b. (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org))