

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 7:51-58.

INTRODUCTION:

1. We are first introduced to Saul of Tarsus in Acts 7:58. In this text, Saul is a young man who was watching the robes of the men who were stoning Stephen to death. Saul "was in hearty agreement with putting him to death" (Acts 8:1A).
2. Saul's background. Acts 22:3. See also Philippians 3:5-6.
3. Saul actively joined in persecuting the church. Acts 8:1B-4; 26:9-11.
4. Why was Saul on the road to Damascus? Acts 9:1-2.
5. What happened to Saul on the road to Damascus? Acts 9:3-6.
6. What God told Saul he must do. Acts 22:12-16.
7. Saul's response to God calling. Acts 26:19



APPLICATIONS:

1. **We can feel right and be totally wrong.** Acts 26:9; 23:1; 1 Corinthians 4:4. The standard for what is right is what the word of God says, not how we feel. If the word of God and our feelings are in conflict, we must bring our feelings into line with the word of God. We must never twist the word of God to bring line it up with our feelings. 2 Peter 3:14-18.
2. **Sincerity brings us to the truth, but we aren't saved unless we believe and obey the truth.**
 - A. Saul, though doing wrong, sincerely wanted to do right. Because he was sincere, Jesus gave him an opportunity to see the truth. 1 Timothy 1:12-13.
 - B. Saul was saved, however, not because he was sincere, but because he changed when he saw the truth. Romans 10:1-4.
 - C. If we sincerely want to know the truth, God will show us the truth. Matthew 7:7-11.
 - D. If we want to be saved, we will act on the truth our sincerity gives us the opportunity to see. Review Matthew 7:13-14, 15-20, 21-23, 24-27.
3. **If we don't believe and obey the truth when we see it, we're not sincere – we're in denial.**
 - A. When faced with the truth, many people don't believe and obey it. Why?
 - 1) They never really wanted the truth. John 12:37, 39-40. See also 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12. Saul did. 1 Timothy 1:12-13.
 - 2) They were not willing to pay the cost of believing and obeying the truth. John 12:42-43. Saul was. Philippians 3:4B-8.
 - B. As human beings, we have the ability to convince ourselves that we believe and obey the truth when, in fact, we've actually seen and rejected the truth. "Let no man deceive himself" (1 Corinthians 3:18A). See also Galatians 6:3; James 1:26; 1 John 1:8.
 - C. If we've deceived ourselves, we are no longer sincere. "Sincere" means "free from pretense or deceit; proceeding from genuine feelings." Rather, we're in denial. "Denial is a defense mechanism postulated by Sigmund Freud, in which a person is faced with a fact that is too uncomfortable to accept and rejects it instead, insisting that it is not true despite what may be overwhelming evidence."
 - D. Sincerity and denial feel exactly the same. As a result, people usually assume they are sincere when they are actually in denial.
 - E. There is no excuse for denial in religion. God expects us to understand His word His way and He doesn't command the impossible. Ephesians 4:4-6; 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Corinthians 3:18A. The people of Matthew 7:21-23 assumed they were sincere, but they were actually self-deceived, in denial, and it cost them their souls.
 - F. 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Do we really want to learn the truth no matter what? Do we really want to believe and obey the truth no matter what? We can deceive ourselves, but we can't fool God. He knows the truth. We don't have to deceive ourselves. We can know the truth. But, we have to be absolutely honest with ourselves and not assume that what feels like sincerity is sincerity because it might actually be denial.
4. **We can change.** Galatians 1:23B.
5. **We can, and should, inspire other people.** Galatians 1:24.
6. **If we want, we can be forgiven of anything.** 1 Timothy 1:15-16.
7. **The past should inspire, not debilitate.** 1 Corinthians 15:8-10.