UNASHAMED · STUDENT GUIDE

Civil *War*

ROMANS 7:14–23 · PASTOR BRIAN CARROLL · NOVEMBER 15, 2026

> *If I belong to Jesus, why do I keep doing the things I hate?*

THE TEXT

> [14] *For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin.* [15] *For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.* [16] *Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.* [17] *So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.* [18] *For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out.* [19] *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.* [20] *Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.* [21] *So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand.* [22] *For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being,* [23] *but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members.*
>
> Romans 7:14–23 (ESV)

SERMON NOTES

POINT 1 · VV. 14-17

Sin Is an Occupying Force in the Life of Every Believer

God's law isn't the problem; Paul says it's "spiritual." The problem is that sin still lives in him. King Ahab "sold himself" to do evil and loved it (1 Kings 21:20). Paul was "sold under sin" and hates it. Following Jesus doesn't mean you'll never struggle. Hating your sin is actually a sign God is at work in you.

"Ahab didn't fight. Paul can't stop fighting."

MY NOTES

POINT 2 · VV. 18-20

A House Divided Cannot Win the War in Its Own Strength

Paul wants to do right but can't pull it off. Verses 18–20 almost repeat verses 14–17, like a loop he can't break. At Fredericksburg in 1862, wave after wave of soldiers charged the same stone wall, and not one reached it. Trying harder wasn't the answer.

"They lost because trying harder was the plan."

MY NOTES

POINT 3 · VV. 21–23

The Battle Lines Run Straight Through the Heart of Every Believer

Two armies are fighting inside Paul: the part of him that loves God's law, and the sin working through his eyes, hands, mouth, and appetites. He calls himself a captive, a prisoner of war. And a prisoner can't free himself.

"Somebody from outside the prison has to come and get him."

MY NOTES

GO DEEPER

For anyone who wants more. Tap to open.

"Sold under sin" (v. 14)

This is slave-market language: someone sold who now belongs to another master. The Old Testament uses the same idea for King Ahab, who "sold himself to do what is evil in the sight of the LORD" (1 Kings 21:20, 25). The difference is that Ahab chose it and enjoyed it. Paul hates it.

"Sin that dwells within me" (vv. 17, 20)

The word pictures sin as a resident, something living in the house. Paul isn't passing the blame. He still owns what he does. But Romans 6:14 promises that sin won't have dominion over a believer. It can still fight, but it no longer owns you.

So many “laws” (vv. 21–23)

In verse 21, “law” means a principle, something that happens every time, like gravity. Then there are two sides: God’s law, which Paul loves with his mind, and “the law of sin,” which works through his body. John Calvin counted four laws in these verses, but they line up on just two sides.

“Waging war” and “captive” (v. 23)

These are military words. “Waging war” pictures an army drawn up for battle. “Captive” is the word for a prisoner of war. Paul isn’t a willing captive; he fights his chains. Next week, in verses 24–25, Paul asks who can rescue him, and the answer changes everything.

HONEST QUESTIONS

If I still struggle with the same sin, am I really saved?

The apostle Paul, years into following Jesus, said, “I do the very thing I hate.” Struggling isn’t proof you aren’t a Christian. Someone with no new life doesn’t lose sleep over sin. The fact that it bothers you is a sign God is at work in you (v. 16).

Isn’t “It’s not me, it’s sin” just an excuse?

It would be if Paul used it to shrug off responsibility, but he doesn’t. He still says “I do it.” He’s explaining who is giving the orders, not claiming he’s innocent. The goal isn’t to excuse sin. It’s to see how serious it is and where help has to come from.

So should I just try harder?

Effort matters, but willpower alone is charging the same stone wall. The answer isn’t to give in to sin, and it isn’t to dig deeper inside yourself. It’s depending on Jesus, who already broke sin’s power over you, and not fighting alone.

Will this fight ever end?

Yes. Every believer fights the flesh until the day we see Jesus, but the war has an ending, and a Rescuer. That's exactly where Paul goes next in verses 24–25.

YOUR TURN

Where's your front line?

The battle lines run straight through you. Where do they run right now? Your tongue, your temper, your phone, a grudge you can't let go of? Name it honestly.

MY FRONT LINE

HOW I'VE BEEN "CHARGING THE WALL" ON MY OWN

This Week's Challenge

Stop fighting alone. This week, tell one Christian you trust (a parent, a leader, a friend) where your front line is, and ask them to pray for you and check on you. Each time the battle hits, pray a one-line prayer: "Jesus, I can't win this on my own. Fight for me."

WHO I TOLD AND HOW IT WENT

REFLECT

Questions for you to think through on your own this week.

1. Are you more like Ahab, at peace with a sin you should hate, or like Paul, fighting something you hate? Be honest.
2. Paul says, “I delight in the law of God.” What part of God’s Word do you actually enjoy? If none, what might that say?
3. A prisoner of war can’t free himself. Who do you think Paul is going to say rescues him?