

# Fifth Sunday in Lent – Epistle

## Flesh Redeemed: From Dead Man Walking (TO) Dear One Dancing

Romans 8:6-11

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## Analysis by Cathy Lessmann

Romans 8:6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. 7For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed it cannot, 8and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. 9 But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. 10But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. The Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

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## DIAGNOSIS: Flesh Destined for Death

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** – *Dead Man Walking*

"Dead man walking!" is the chilling proclamation heard in prisons when a condemned criminal is walked to the execution chamber. We all know that even though he's alive and walking, he's as good as dead; a literal "body of death" (7:24). His present actions, in fact, his entire "being" smacks of his future (his destiny, execution). Paul suggests that this is

exactly the scenario with the self whose mind is “set on the flesh.” All actions in the present, no matter how good the intentions, already reflect the death that flesh has coming. What the flesh does is evil, there is “nothing good” that comes out of it (7:18), it does “not submit to God’s law,” it is hostile to God (v. 7). In fact, even when the self (with its mind “set on the flesh”) sets out to do good, it accomplishes only evil (7:19)!

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** – *Dead Man Choking*  
Why? Because the self is aspirating the fumes of death. Paul calls this sin. Sin surges through and so infiltrates flesh that flesh is enslaved (v. 7). Sin causes total self-absorption. Being possessed by sin becomes the “law” that governs behavior, making it impossible to act according to God’s laws. Paul confesses, “with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin” (7:25). Is it any wonder then that nothing God-pleasing emanates from such aspirations?

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem)** – *Dead Man Gone (Executed)*

There is only one destiny in store for flesh so self absorbed: the death chamber. “The body is dead because of sin” (v. 10). “If you live according to the flesh, you will die” (8:13). This is because “those who are in the flesh cannot please God” (v. 8). Far from being “dear” to God, those in the flesh are repulsive, displeasing, and ultimately, rejected (condemned). Flesh has to die. No wonder Paul cries out, “Who will rescue me [us]?” (7:24).

## **PROGNOSIS: Flesh Destined for Glory**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution)** – *Dead Man Lives!*  
Good question! And wow, what an answer! GOD comes to the rescue! His rescue involves sending his “own Son” Jesus to be a dead man walking. Jesus became “flesh” (but, in this case, flesh not

enslaved by sin) who “walked the mile” all the way to his execution, absorbing flesh’s condemnation in death. When God raised him (dead man come alive!), he simultaneously created the possibility for a new destiny to all the “walking dead.” “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (8:1). “He who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies” (v. 11).

#### **Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Dear One Breathes**

What a rescue! Not only can the Dead Man come alive (“life to mortal bodies,” v. 11), but he/she who trusts Jesus become dear, even precious, to God. The new wind (breath, spirit) that rushes in and replaces the old choking fumes of death is the Spirit of God. This breath is life giving. It re-vitalizes and invigorates. It ends the death-grip of the “law of sin” over flesh and becomes the new “law” which governs the self. “For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death” (8:2).

#### **Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Dear One Dances**

Christ-trusters can act righteously because they’re living off of a righteous person. And the new self created in Christ is destined for life, i.e., one who has his/her “mind set on the Spirit” (v. 6)–already experiences eternal life (new destiny) in the present. The Dear One dances! In fact, the Dear One cannot help but act in a life-giving, “righteous” way because the Spirit is surging through him/her. Having been freed from self-absorption (sin), the Dear One focuses on others and experiences “life and peace” (v. 6). With such freedom, the Dear One boldly trusts that ALL things work together for his/her good (8:28).