

# Sixth Sunday after Pentecost, Epistle, Year A

IN CHRIST'S SPIRIT

Romans 8:1-11

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Lori A. Cornell

1There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. 2For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, 4so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. 6To 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.

9But 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. 11If 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.

DIAGNOSIS: In the Flesh

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): In the Flesh (v. 9)

It would seem that Paul “doth protest” too much here. By insisting that the Romans are not in the flesh (v. 9), he seems actually to be saying that this is a very real and potential problem for these Christians. Paul has already exposed this conundrum in a prior personal confession: “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do” (7:19). Paul, the self-controlled former Pharisee, finds that dealing with his own human flesh isn’t as easy as he once would have liked to believe.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Weakened by the Flesh (v. 3)

But the situation is worse than that, because if you are in the flesh, you disregard God’s commands (ignoring God and failing to love your neighbor), and that weakens the force of the law itself (v. 3). We can tell ourselves to obey the law but, as Paul admits, that doesn’t mean we can actually fulfill its expectations. Worse yet, to rely on our weak flesh to fulfill the weakened law, we are looking in the wrong place for consolation. We’ve set our sights on the law as if it were an end in itself. And that’s not where God wants us to look for consolation.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Sin in the Flesh Condemned (v. 3)

To rely on our flesh to fulfill the law, means we are seeking our own way, not God’s. That leaves us condemned. Our sin lingers (v. 3). And as long as we look to ourselves for a solution, that sin remains—with all its consequent judgment. We have no way to deal with our own sin. It is unremitting. Go ahead and try all you want, but our human efforts will eventually fail. We may linger in the illusion that we have control over our weak flesh and the law, but our folly will be

exposed.

## PROGNOSIS: In Christ Jesus

### Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Set Free (v. 2)

But what if God doesn't just surrender us to sin and death, and the law's accompanying judgment? What if, instead, God comes down in the very same flesh we wear (v. 3), to deal with our conundrum—that we intend good, but do evil? That is what accomplishes in Jesus' incarnation, and ultimately his death and resurrection (all intimately linked): Jesus deals with sin, by taking the hit, lifting the burden, getting us out of this vicious tail-chasing that we are bound to do. He dies one death for us all, and does it willingly—not because he has to, but because God would rather bear the blows of human sin, than consign us to its prison. And, in fact, Jesus' own conviction on the cross sets us free from the law of sin and death (v. 2). He trades to us his righteousness for our sin; he gives up his Spirit in his dying breath, and in the resurrection we receive that same Spirit (v. 11)

### Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Mind on the Spirit (vv. 6, 10, 11)

The air Christ breathed and breathes (living God's self-giving love) becomes the air we breathe; his Spirit dwells in us, and we are in-spired (in-Spirited), filled with his Holy Spirit. And having been inspired, we long for that inspiration to be our way of life. So we set our minds on the Spirit. One consequence of this mind-set is to experience new life and new peace with God (v. 6). Another way of experiencing life in the Spirit is to recognize that we've been given something that we didn't have and couldn't achieve before: Christ's righteousness (v. 10.)

### Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Life for Mortal Bodies (v. 11)

And Christ's righteousness is just better for everyone. Knowing that we have life in Christ's Spirit we don't have to go looking for righteousness in all the wrong places—that is, in ourselves or in the law. Instead, we can look to the Spirit, call upon the Spirit, and give thanks to Christ in our mortal bodies —knowing full well that the freedom we now experience is not something we've simply discovered or conjured within ourselves (v. 11). Instead this life is a gift of a self-giving God. And that God gives us the Spirit so that, no longer consumed by spiritual tail-chasing, we might give ourselves away to the world as freely as Christ gave himself to us.