

A reading that can be deadly (15A; Romans 8:1-11)

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I grew up in Winter Park, Florida, a suburb of Orlando. Winter Park was the home of a prominent so-called ex-gay ministry that taught that “same-sex attraction” could be overcome with prayer and resistance.

Gays and lesbians, they taught, could even end up marrying someone of the opposite sex as, they believed, God intended.

I grew up in a family without any particular religious devotion, other than occasional church appearances for Christmas. No one in my house was telling me that God wanted gay people to change. And yet, the message still sank in. Even though I knew, even as a young teenager, that it was all hogwash, part of me wondered if I just wasn't trying hard enough when my thoughts drifted to the girls I had crushes on.

This passage from Paul is one that has been used to inflict pain upon LGBTQ people (as well as on countless others). A quick Google search about homosexuality and these verses shows you how loved it is by those who believe there is a battle between God and “the flesh.” In order to be holy, they believe, the body must be subjugated to the spirit.

That ex-gay ministry from my hometown was disbanded a few years ago. I'm glad for that. But for so many of us who were even at the peripheral edges of its reach,

the damage was done. For many of us it would take years to undo the programming and learn to believe that the body could, indeed, be not just acceptable but even holy.

There are some scriptures that we are called to preach with great caution. That does not mean we should not preach them, but it does mean that we should do so only with the understanding of how they can harm. Used casually, this passage can be as deadly as any lectionary reading out there. But used well, this passage can be a call to love of self, including body.