

## **The Ten Promises - “A Protest Against Inhumanity” - Comm. 6**

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - Jan. 3, 2021  
(Based on Rev. Darrell Johnson's sermon series *The Manufacturer's Specifications*)

We're continuing our Ten Commandments series drawing from the book of sermons by Rev. Darrell Johnson called *The Manufacturer's Specifications*. Today we focus on the sixth commandment: **“You shall not murder.”**

OK, class dismissed. We can move on to communion now. I mean, I don't think anyone plans on breaking this today.... Now it is tempting for us when reading the Ten Commandments to quickly say, *“Yes! That's right. I've got the message.”* And then move on to a more relevant commandment. For the fact of the matter is, ninety-nine point nine percent of us in this room will never murder anyone. And we have no intention of ever doing so.

But the Lawgiver does not let us off that quickly. For Yahweh comes down from the mountain top - all the way down - and enters into the inhumanity in Person, as Jesus of Nazareth. And in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus exposes the unresolved anger in our hearts from which the act of murder emerges. Jesus says:

**“You have heard that the ancients were told, ‘You shall not commit murder’ and ‘Whoever commits murder shall be liable to the court’. But I say to you that everyone who is angry with their brother or sister shall be guilty before the court; and whoever says to their brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ shall be guilty before the**

supreme court; and whoever shall say, 'You fool,' shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell" Matthew 5:21-22.

**"You shall not murder."**

The "you" in the commandment is singular, as it is in the other nine commandments. **"You, as an individual human being, shall not take another human being's life."** The sixth commandment is Yahweh's "yes" to life. To take another person's life is to speak our "no" to God's "yes."

As is the case in each of the Ten Commandments, the Creator is here revealing something about ourselves. The Creator is revealing the sanctity of human life. Every human life, however young or old, however deformed or evil, is sacred. Sacred because every human life, regardless of the circumstances in which it is conceived, is the work of God. To take the life of another human being is to destroy a work of God.

Life is sacred not because it is life, but because life is a gift of God. Every human life is a gift of God. My life is a gift of God. Your life is a gift of God. Indeed, every human life belongs to God. Only God has the right to give it. Only God has the right to take it away.

So we can restate the sixth commandment this way: ***"No human being has the right to unilaterally take another human being's life; no human being has the authority or right to take the God-given life of another."***

In every act of murder two claims are being made.

(1) First, the goal achieved by the act is of greater value than the God-given life of the person murdered. People kill for all kinds of reasons: to protect their status, to gain money, to get revenge, to maintain their lifestyle, or to cover up mistakes. When someone kills another person, he or she is claiming, “My status, my financial security, my lifestyle, my desire to get even, is of greater value than your life.”

(2) But secondly, the act is claiming that the goal achieved is of such value that it justifies taking into one’s own hands the sole prerogative of God. Only God has the right to take away life. Every act of murder is, therefore, an act of idolatry. Hubris is the technical word: *a human being presuming to exercise God’s role.*

Which explains why King David prays the way he does in Psalm 51. Psalm 51 is the prayer David prays when, after his affair with Bathsheba and his having her husband killed, he was exposed by the prophet Nathan. David prays to God, “**Against You I have sinned**” Psalm 51:4.

He sinned against God? Wasn’t his sin against Bathsheba and her vow of marriage? Wasn’t his sin against Uriah, her husband, and his life? Wasn’t his sin against the kingdom of Israel for his abuse of power? Yes! But fundamentally, and ultimately, all of it was against God. For David had “dehumanized” Bathsheba and Uriah. And

he had presumed to take the role of Yahweh into his own hands. **“Against You I have sinned.”**

Every human being, however problematic, however evil, is the work of God. Every human being, whatever the circumstance which conceived him or her, is a creation of God. **“You shall not take into your hands the right to take another person’s life.”**

Which brings us to Jesus and His radicalizing of the sixth commandment in His Sermon on the Mount. *“Acts do not come out of nowhere,”* says scholar K.C. Hansen. Murder does not come out of nowhere. Acts emerge from our hearts. Jesus, therefore, makes us face what is going on in our hearts.

**“You have heard the ancients were told ‘You shall not murder’... but I say to you....”** Jesus draws out the deeper intent of the sixth commandment. Jesus deepens, heightens and extends God’s protest against inhumanity. Jesus points to our anger against a brother or sister, anger that is left unresolved. And Jesus points to our sarcastic remarks. The word **“Raca”** is related to the word which means **“empty.”** **“You empty heard!”** **“You idiot!”** **“Stupid!”**

It calls into question the other person’s mental competence. It calls into question another person’s intelligence. And Jesus points to our insulting remarks. **“You fool!”** The Greek word is *“more,”* from which we get the word *“moron.”* The word is used to call into question

another person's personhood, to insult another person's character.

**“You have heard that the ancients were told ‘You shall not murder’ ...but I say to you....”** Notice that in Jesus' extension of the sixth commandment there is an *“escalation,”* moving from serious to more serious acts (Pinchas Lapide, The Sermon on the Mount, p. 49; F. Dale Bruner, The Christbook, p. 175.). Jesus starts with nursing our anger. Then He moves to the casual sarcastic remark, **“raca.”** And then he moves to the deliberate insult, **“You fool!”**

And Jesus says there is an “escalation” of consequences, an escalating degree of judgment. The nursing of anger is subject to judgment before the city council. Uttering the sarcastic remark is subject to judgment before the Supreme Court. Speaking the flagrant insult is subject to judgment in hell!

**“You shall not murder” ...but I say to you....”** Jesus is not saying that nursing anger and uttering sarcastic and insulting words are murder. Anger is not murder. Sarcasm is not murder. Insult is not murder. Yes, as John Stott, connecting on Jesus' words, says: *“Anger and insults are ugly symptoms of a desire to get rid of somebody who is in the way”* (Christian Counter-Culture, p. 85). And yes, sarcasm and insult are forms of *“character assassination.”* But Jesus is not saying that anger, sarcasm, and insult are murder.

What He is saying is that behind, beneath, and prior to the act of murder is the act of nursing anger, which spills over into sarcastic remarks and insulting words. He is telling us that homicide, the ultimate act of inhumanity, comes out of the reservoir of unresolved anger.

The Incarnate Lawgiver is telling us that nursing anger is just as displeasing to God as murder, just as damaging to relationships as murder, and just as deserving of judgment as murder. He is telling us that uttering casual remarks is just as displeasing to God as murder, just as damaging to relationships as murder, and just as deserving of judgment as murder. He is telling us that verbally insulting another person is just as displeasing to God as murder, just as damaging to relationships as murder, and just as deserving of judgment as murder.

Just share your political opinion on your Facebook wall and see if Jesus is on to something. How many people will reply with, “*You fool!*”? “*You fool*” is dehumanizing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it best in his book entitled, The Cost of Discipleship. The sixth commandment tells us that another person’s life “*is a boundary which we dare not pass.*” Jesus takes the protest against inhumanity further by saying, “*even anger is enough to overstep the mark, still more the casual angry word (‘raca’), and most of all the deliberate insult (‘You fool!’)*” (p. 143).

So what do we do about the inhumanity in our hearts? From Jesus’ extension of the protest against inhumanity

starting at Matthew 5:23, I think we can suggest four steps to take to deal with the internal violence out of which murder arises:

- 1) First, realize my own hearts capacity for inhumanity. That there are, in fact, times I want to get rid of the person who is in my way (Matthew 15:17-20; Jeremiah 17:9).
- 2) Second, confess my inner inhumanity. Tell God what I see in myself, banking on the promises that when I do I am forgiven and cleansed (1 John 1:5-10).
- 3) Third, forgive those who have inflicted their inhumanity on me. Decide to forgive. If I cannot do it, ask God to give me the grace to forgive. An unforgiving spirit will eat at me and finally express itself externally, if only in ulcers and headaches. Somewhere along the line I need to decide not to murder myself with unforgiveness. Decide to be free of the hatred, the need to get even, and the need for an apology. Forgive.
- 4) Fourth, reach out and try to reconcile. I may be further rejected as I reach out. I may be further stomped on. But at least the inhumanity is no longer boiling my heart. It all depends on how free a heart I want to have.

And know that **the Lawgiver will help us**. He really wants our hearts to be free. **First**, by breathing His Spirit into us again, enabling us to decide and act. And **second**, by giving us soul mates that can help us check the

inhumanity. By giving us people who can hear our confession of inhumanity, and lead us to the cross where inhumanity is healed.

In another of his books, titled *Life Together*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer describes the kind of person before whom it is safe to open the inhumanity of our hearts. He writes:

*“To whom shall we make confession? According to Jesus’ promise, every Christian brother can hear the confession of another. Anybody who lives beneath the Cross and who has discerned in the Cross of Jesus the utter wickedness of all men and of his own heart will find there is no sin that can ever be alien to him. Anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother. Only the brother [or sister] under the Cross can hear a confession.”*

At the cross the Lawgiver breaks the power of inhumanity. How? The Lawgiver takes all of the inhumanity upon Himself. Inhumanity breeds counter-inhumanity. Violence breeds counter-violence. At the cross the chain of violence is broken. The Living God absorbs the full onslaught of human inhumanity. The cross is the protest against inhumanity taken to the limit.

Are you harboring any resentment against anyone today? Are you holding a grudge? Are you letting anger fester? Do you feel rising envy or greed? Are you bitter about

how someone has treated you? Deal with it now by bringing it to the Crucified One. It is the failure to deal with the violence within that makes our world so violent. We may not be able to do anything today about the violence “out there.” But we can do something about the violence “in here.” We can bring it to the cross. And then maybe we can be useful to the Savior as He protests all forms of inhumanity.