



# Mere Morality: What God Expects from Ordinary People

*Lewis B. Smedes*

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Is there a morality that shows us how to survive as a humane community? Can we know what God expects of the human family? Is there a morality for ordinary people?

In this book, the author of *Sex for Christians* and *Love within Limits* explores the way to moral sanity amid the confusions and crises of contemporary life. We do not, says Smedes, have a "moral map" to mark out the details of our route in advance, but neither are we left to grope and improvise at every step.

The focus of Smedes's study is the commandments -- in particular those five of the Ten Commandments which call us to respect other persons: "Honor your father and mother"; "You shall not kill"; "You shall not commit adultery"; "You shall not steal"; "You shall not bear false witness." Each of these commandments pinpoints the moral nucleus of one sector of life in community -- family, marriage, property, communication, and the preservation of life itself.

Using these commandments as a basis, Smedes asks three questions: What does God command us to do? Why does he command this? And how can we obey this in the ambiguities and conflicts of real life?

Smedes answers the first question by extracting the simple meaning of the commands. He probes answers to the second question -- why? -- on the premise that a reasonable Creator commands his creatures only to be what they are and to act in ways that fit their nature as human beings in community. "Moral norms are not alien," claims Smedes, "they conform to our being."

It is in answering how to obey these commandments in ordinary life that Smedes moves from the ancient words at Sinai to the troubled twentieth-century context in which we live. This is not always an easy task. The commandment may signal a clear moral direction, but determining whether and how its absolute fits into each new situation will require patient common sense, tough-minded reason, and devout faith. Such painful struggles, for which Smedes provides eloquent guidance are at the core of responsible moral living.

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