

# Right or Wrong? The new normal

April 13, 2012

**Some people say our society's economic issues, theological persuasions and cultural norms comprise a "new normal." Does this mean morals are diminishing, or are we looking at a completely different cultural shape? Are gospel values still important?**

When I hear the phrase "new normal," I think of my seventh-grade English teacher. I am sure she would have classified "new normal" as a fine example of an oxymoron. Like jumbo shrimp or short sermon, an oxymoron is a figure of speech in which two words appear side-by-side but have apparently contradictory meanings.

What is the new normal? We hear economic volatility may be the new normal; we should get used to it. We see reality TV proudly airing what used to be considered "dirty laundry," yet we find ourselves glued to the next episode. Your pastor laments the once-monthly Sunday morning attendance, far removed from the old normal of twice on Sunday plus mid-week participation every week of the year.

What are the dangers of the new normal? These behaviors certainly raise issues for the church. We hear a shocking word on evening television and think, "They didn't used to be able to say that." An unmarried couple shares the same address, and most of their peers think nothing of it. It is not so much that any of this is new, but rather that it is all so common. And by this desensitization, formerly disdained conduct now is openly tolerated and, dare we say, even accepted.

The questions for the Christian are: Are my biblical values still applicable? Do my Christian principles still carry weight? Does the church still have a

voice in the world?" Undeniably, the answer is yes.

Since Jesus addressed behavior in the Sermon on the Mount, Christian ethics have attempted to define a new normal. Jesus recognized his hearers always had heard one standard of behavior. Yet he came to teach the new way—the way it ought to be. From our earliest beginnings, Christians have been called to counter normal, behaving differently from the world. Things have not changed today.

The greatest danger to the church in the age of new normal is when normal for the world becomes normal for the church. In an effort to be relevant, the church constantly is challenged to find new ways to share the old story. As we seek effective means, we must persist in accountability, asking ourselves whether or not the new way endangers—or out-and-out violates—our Christian values. The ways of sharing the story may be new; the values of the faith are unchanged and eternal.

Our relentless task is to present the gospel in a new and refreshingly convicting way. At the same time, we must work diligently to live as the unchanging Christ. That should be our new normal.

Allen Reasons, senior minister

Fifth Avenue Baptist Church

Huntington, W.Va.

*Right or Wrong?* is co-sponsored by the Texas Baptist theological education office and Christian Life Commission. Send your questions about how to apply your faith to [bill.tillman@texasbaptists.org](mailto:bill.tillman@texasbaptists.org).