

## **Introduction**

How many of you are familiar with a term "**the new normal?**" No one knows its origin, but it may have been coined after the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995. The idea was that now that this has happened, what was normal won't be normal anymore. Since then, it has come to connote that what was once abnormal is now normal.

The term "**the new normal**" appears in a wide variety of contexts. Economists, for instance, use it to describe our current and long-running economic malaise. What was once abnormal, high unemployment and low interest rates, is now normal. Or sociologists use it to describe our changing family structure. NBC in fact televises a sitcom with that title, *The New Normal*. It's about a gay couple, a woman who's the surrogate mother for their child, her daughter, and her grandmother – all of whom live together as a family. What was once abnormal, that, is now normal.

But of all the contexts in which the term "**the new normal**" appears, the most affecting is the moral. In that context, the new normal is nothing more than the old abnormal and that's what I'm going to preach about today on this second Sunday of "**Bibleworm Month.**" Turn to Proverbs 28:4 and its companion Isaiah 32:5-8.

## **Those Who Forsake the Bible**

I begin with Proverbs 28:4 and "**those who forsake the law.**" As we learned last week, the word "**law**" refers to the written word of God that the wise man had – the first five books of the Old Testament. It's synonymous with our written word of God, which is the 66 books of the Bible. The word "**forsake**" connotes rejecting something - in this case, the Bible. Rejecting the Bible is a matter of belief. It's thinking it to be not authoritative and helpful. It's also a matter of practice. It's not taking it into account in perceiving, interpreting, deciding, and doing.

Sadly, that's the condition of our own culture. It has forsaken the Bible. Christian apologist Francis Schaeffer explained it this way in his

book *The Great Evangelical Disaster*: **“In the last sixty years, the consensus upon which our culture was built has shifted from one that was largely Christian to a consensus that stands in total antithesis to Christian truth at every point including destruction of the Bible.”** Schaeffer wrote those words in 1984 and I can tell you this. Our culture is far less Biblical now than it was then. It’s post-Biblical.

It is so first of all in the public arena. Richard Neuhaus coined a term, the **“naked public square.”** It means that our social institutions – political, legal, educational, scientific, medical, and psychological to name a few – have shut out Biblical content from their conversations, points of view, decisions, and actions. Consider this. In three years of law school education, I never once heard a professor relate a legal issue to the Bible. I can’t remember, in fact, a professor even mentioning the Bible. Or consider this. A congressman stated that Biblical ethics can guide the personal lives of congressman but can’t their political lives, which is the majority view in America. Our social institutions, generally, have declared their domains off limits to Biblical content. They comprise a naked public square.

But it isn’t just the public arena that’s post-Biblical. It’s the personal lives of Americans as well. The Barn Research Group conducted a survey that asked people to agree or disagree with the following statement: **“The Bible is the written word of God, and is totally accurate in all that it teaches.”** 58% agreed and 42% disagreed. But of the 58% who agreed, half of those think it isn’t binding on us. The bottom line is that 70% of Americans believe the Bible isn’t authoritative.

That explains a phenomenon that we witness everyday in the lives of the people around us. It’s as if the Bible doesn’t even exist to them. It doesn’t influence how they perceive and interpret things. It also doesn’t direct or even condition what they decide and do. They don’t take it into account in the running of their lives.

The Bible implies, for instance, that we should rejoice when others outshine us. I once said that to a gymnastics parent who replied: **“No**

**athlete who lives by that rule will be a winner.”** He rejected what I said out of hand not because he contested that the Bible implies that, but because it doesn’t matter at all, in his mind, that it does.

It’s tragic but true. Our social institutions and most Americans themselves have forsaken the Bible.

### **Praise the Wicked**

And there’s a consequence. According to Proverbs 28:4, they **“praise the wicked.”**

Isaiah makes the same observation in 32:5 of his book. In verses 1-4, he describes the coming Messianic kingdom of Jesus, which has many defining characteristics. Isaiah identifies one of those in verse 5. In verse 6, he defines the qualities of a fool, in verse 7, the qualities of a rogue, and in verse 8, the qualities of one who is noble. Well, according to verse 5, in the Messianic kingdom, **“No longer will the fool be called noble, or the rogue spoken of as generous.”**

The words **“no longer”** have a reference point, which the previous chapters reveal. It’s people who forsake God’s written word. Notice the effect of they doing so. As verse 5 implies, they call those who do the evils of verse 6 noble and those who do the evils of verse 7 generous. That is the effect of them forsaking God’s written word, moral insanity. They think and act as if what is good is bad and what is bad is good, as if what is right is wrong and what is wrong is right.

Unfortunately, that effect describes the condition of our culture today. Cause: it has forsaken the Bible. Effect: moral insanity. In both the public arena and their own personal lives, the majority of Americans think and act as if what is normal morally is abnormal and what is abnormal is normal. They are out of touch with reality in that regard, which makes them morally insane.

I know what some of you are probably thinking. **“Insane”** is an awfully harsh word and an exaggeration, but it isn’t.

**“Sex Week”** at Yale is a case in point. **“Sex week”** is a biennial

event that its website defines as **“an interdisciplinary sex education program designed to pique student’ interest through creative, interactive, and exciting programming.”** What kind of programming? In one class, a porn star stripped down to bare breasts and led a student around the room in handcuffs. In another, students screened hard core pornography. Those are typical of Sex Week events, which Yale’s senior administrators not only allow but heartily endorse. My point is this. Sex week is abnormal morally. But those who forsake the Bible think it’s normal. It’s raunch, filth, and sleaze. But they **“call”** it education. If that isn’t moral insanity, I don’t know what is!

Or consider, reality TV. Reality TV, for the most part, features interpersonal conflict. It creates settings that encourage and even require the people involved to attack each other. Anger, resentment, retaliation, and tension are the order of the day. That is abnormal morally. But those who forsake the Bible think it’s normal. It’s degradation. But they **“call”** it entertainment. Again, if that isn’t insanity, I don’t know what is!

You can see that what our texts teach is true. Those who forsake the Bible do praise the wicked. They embrace the **“new normal”** principle. They think and act as if what is abnormal morally is normal.

### **Those Who Keep the Law**

But there’s something else they teach us in 28:4, **“Those who keep the law strive with the wicked.”** Notice that we’re to do two things.

First, we’re to **“keep the law/Bible.”** Keeping the Bible is a two step process. I explained the second step last week. Just do it. Train and try the best we can to do all that it says and implies. Act Biblically. But there’s another step that’s prior to that one. Think Biblically. All of us have ways of thinking about things that condition and even direct how we live and act. Well, it’s imperative that our ways of thinking about those things be Biblical.

Making them that is one of the greatest challenges we face. In his

famous book *Democracy in America*, published in 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville, warned our young democracy about what he called **“the tyranny of the majority.”** Democracy cultivates equality and commonness, and that, de Tocqueville observed, poses the danger of determining truth, goodness, and beauty by vote. He was right. The fact is that most Americans, including many Christians, tend to measure the validity of a belief by its popular reception. Any point of view that commands a large enough following, they think, must be a valid one.

A youth leader discussed several sexual issues with his youth group including couples living together and homosexuality. Afterwards, a teenager from a Christian home told him that he didn’t need to discuss those issues anymore. **“Why do you say that?”** he asked. To which she replied, **“It’s already been decided that they’re okay.”** Enough people believe they’re normal morally that they must be, she thinks.

But you and I know better. We know that what is popular may or may not be normal. In contrast, what is Biblical (because it’s an expression of God’s nature) is always normal. Consequently, we don’t *tamper* with Biblical content or *discard* it, just because it isn’t popular. We believe *what the Bible says* and we believe it *as it says it*.

Consider the vital issues in our culture today: consumerism, sports, sex, art, music, welfare, materialism, divorce, instant credit, and more. Popular worldviews have developed around all of those issues that typical Americans swallow hook, line, and sinker – including Christians. But we don’t. We stand firm. We think Biblically, not culturally, about them. As Shirl Hoffman writes, **“Public taste is never a good barometer of morality.”** But the Bible is. So, keep it. Think Biblically!

### **Strive with the Wicked**

According to Proverbs 28:4, we’re to do a second thing. Strive with the wicked.

You and I, because we follow Jesus, take seriously what we designate the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18-20. In that

commission, Jesus calls us to make disciples who follow Him.

But there's another commission that we find here in Proverbs 28:4. It's what we might call the cultural commission. In that commission, Jesus calls us to engage the world not just evangelize it – to bring Biblical truth to it. In the Great Commission, we're attempting to save souls. In the cultural commission, we're attempting to save minds.

Secular people, as we've seen, have forsaken the Bible. They've judged it to be not binding and irrelevant. That's their belief and we need to address it whenever we can. We stand up for the Bible and its content. We defend, debate, explain, and even oppose as opportunities to do so arise – humbly but confidently as well.

I once conversed with a law student who commented to two other law students and me that the Bible is hopelessly out of date. I couldn't let that go. I had to debate it and did. I asked him, **"What does the Bible say about sex, money, work, criticism, anger, and the tongue?"** After he replied he didn't know, I said: **"You obviously don't know its content. How then can you make any judgments at all about it, especially that it's out of date?"** I went on to claim that the spiritual, psychological, moral, and even historical truths it records are timeless. They're as vital and relevant today as they were 3,000 years ago. I explained Paul's psychology in Romans 7 as an example of that. He didn't convert to Jesus that day, but at least he knows something now he didn't before. He isn't informed enough to be making any judgments about the Bible.

## **Conclusion**

We now know that there is an objective standard for determining what is normal and abnormal, morally. That standard isn't popular vote. It's the Bible. Something is normal if it's consistent with the Bible. It's abnormal if it isn't. There is, therefore, no such thing as **"the new normal."** **"The new normal"** is nothing more than **"the old abnormal."** So, let's live accordingly. Keep the Bible and strive with the wicked.