

217 *Get your metanoia right!*

I've just realised how my last two articles fit together to illustrate a fundamental error that I've made throughout my Christian life.

Are you old enough to remember the phrases 'living in sin' and 'born out of wedlock' – to have used them of other people, even? I remember discussions when we first got married about one of Sue's colleagues; Sue was insistent that even though she was 'living together' with someone, she was still her friend. (Anyway, as the church never tires of pointing out, we're all 'living in sin', every day, and we need to 'repent' of those sins.^[215])

I remember thinking (but not wanting to argue with Sue!), 'But what difference does a piece of paper make?! Surely, if they are committed together, that's what really matters!' Even then I was a radical, and you might argue that I was on the slippery slope of letting the world influence my thinking, rather than sticking to what the Bible teaches – and look where that has got me!^[216]

Now, in my recent studies of Revelation, with my hero Tom Wright, I've been keeping an eye out for what John says about our metanoia (I'm deliberately not using the R-word), and it seems to me that he's mainly telling the Christians they must **turn back to their first love**.

How many of you, like me, felt an overwhelming sense of joy when you first came to faith, only to lose it again (and again and again in my case – see my very first article.^[01])

What went wrong for me? What went wrong for the church? What has caused the world's view of Christians to be that of narrow-minded people always telling others how to behave?

Here's how I'd express it: Metanoia is biblical, 'repentance' (in our current use of the word) is not. Metanoia is about relationship, repentance tends to focus ethics – right and wrong actions.

We need to recapture God's heart, God's main concern. I think God would say to us, at every church service, 'Metanoia back to me!' And if we return to our first love, time and time again, then our ethics will follow; we'll do what's right because we love God so much.

Now let's turn to the 'elephant in the room'. How will you relate to the gay Christian couple in your congregation who have studied their Bibles and come up with a different answer from you about the ethics of gay sex? Indeed, how will you relate to me? I now believe that I have allowed my feelings about gay sex, plus 'what I've always been taught', to form my view of sexual ethics.

I'm not telling you that my understanding of Scripture is right, but I am insistent that we should regularly metanoia, and we should never, ever look down on someone who has a different view of biblical ethics. I certainly could never say that gay sex is immoral, sorry!

If you do want to consider revisiting your views on sexual ethics, I'd recommend David Gushee's *Changing our mind*, the unnamed book behind my articles.^[145-157]

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