

## 422 *How do we disagree?*

Last week, on social media, a non-conformist minister said that Sarah Mullally's appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury was '*a sham unbiblical pompous event*'. In response to his 700 words of invective, I wrote an article. It helped me work off my annoyance, but this is not that article. Returning invective for invective is not God's way!

One issue I have is that he takes it as a *given* that women should not lead churches, saying, '*Scripture is not unclear*', and gives us '*the plain teaching*' of 'A bishop then must be... the husband of one wife'.<sup>1 Tim 3:2</sup> A woman can't be a husband, so she can't be a bishop. But a single man isn't a husband, so can he be a bishop? Interpretation and application are often *not* simple.

And he is quoting from the AV, but in 400 years, the meanings of some English words have changed massively.<sup>[418]</sup> The author claims that we are '*editing the Word of God*' to suit our own preferences, but more recent translations are potentially more accurate, as they can benefit from 400 years of linguistic and biblical scholarship, plus archaeological and scientific knowledge.

To illustrate the danger of using the AV, later in the same sentence, Paul explains that a bishop is someone who 'ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection'.

But to be fair to the author, what *should* we do if we feel that the church is misinterpreting what Scripture teaches? What should Luther and his friends have done?!

As I say, I think his main error is in suggesting that interpreting and applying the Scriptures is plain and simple – it is not. There are many difficult issues to grapple with in working out what God intends for 21st century Christians, which I can illustrate from a more immediate issue. (I stupidly thought that the issue of women's ministry had more or less gone away!)

So (genuine question) what should my six friends do,<sup>[421]</sup> who believe that gay sex is immoral? In an email, one friend asked – as a genuine question, not as a dogmatic statement – '*How do you understand 1 Cor 5, when it comes to judging or not?*' Paul says 'you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister<sup>[a]</sup> but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler.'<sup>1 Cor 5:11</sup>

<sup>[a]</sup>The Greek word for 'brother or sister' (*adelphos*) refers here to a believer, whether man or woman, as part of God's family. (NIV)

Some of my six friends feel that people in gay relationships shouldn't take church leadership roles, but if they are persistently immoral, maybe we should exclude them from the church?

None of this is easy, is it? My friends think I am rejecting the plain meaning of Scripture and promoting immorality, but I think that people who are gay should be allowed to follow their own consciences.

Maybe this is a church-splitting issue – a new Reformation? I sincerely hope not, for the sake of the kingdom.