

# *Spiritual Appreciation & Respect*



Recently in the media, there has been attention on abuse in the church and society. An Anglican survey in Australia has revealed that over half of Anglican women and a third of Anglican men have suffered from domestic violence. Women MPs have also reported that there is a definite difference between the way men and women are treated in our parliaments.

There are many forms of abuse. Spiritual abuse is one type which occurs among Christians and is often connected with other abuse, such as physical, verbal, social or emotional. It can be described as using power based on religious beliefs to control others. If a woman is hit or yelled at by her partner, and later lovingly fondled and expected to forgive the earlier action, how is she, a Christian, to behave?

Our beliefs as Christians can influence how we treat those we live with, behave towards people of other races, our responses to Climate Change and the uncertainty and fear caused by COVID-19, etc.. In this leaflet I have chosen to discuss responding to abusive sexist and racist words and actions by encouraging the appreciation and respect of each person as God's loved creature, regardless of gender or race.

In Galatians 3:28, we read that being baptized into Christ means that for us, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

When we read the service of Christian baptism, we find there is only the one baptism for everyone, whatever their gender or race. We are all baptized into the one body of Christ, have the same freedom as children of God, and are loved and delighted in by God, our creator. To condone inequality between sexes or races of people is spiritual abuse. It contradicts our belief in the loving God we claim to worship and in whose image we are all made.

In the Anglican Church of Australia, women are being ordained as deacons, priests and bishops in most dioceses, but not all. Many of us, but again, not all, accept that women and men are both made in the image of God, in whom is both male and female, and can exercise leadership in the church, although they may at times express it differently.

Dorothy A. Lee, an Australian Anglican theologian, believes that to deny authority to women in home and church, is a form of spiritual abuse. She declares in her book, "The Ministry of Women in the New Testament" (2021), page 187, "The church is subjecting gifted women to a real and painful form of exclusion that, in theological terms, denies the nature and reality of their faith and baptism."

Cultural and religious norms have influenced people in the past, and still do, to regard the status of women as beneath that of men, yet, when examining the position of women in the gospels, a different picture emerges.

Jesus was born of a woman, Mary. His birth relied on Mary's acceptance of God's invitation regardless of the suffering it would mean for her. The close relationship she had with Jesus is shown in her trust in him when the wine ran out at a wedding feast (John 2:1-5); her presence at the cross (John 19:25-27); and her being named among the men and women who were members of the incipient church (Acts 1:14).

Other women were also connected with the life of Jesus. In John 4, a Samaritan woman (belonging to a group often scorned by Jews) led other Samaritans to recognize that Jesus was the Messiah, and in Mark 14:3-9 a woman served Jesus by anointing him at Bethany before his death.

It is noteworthy that the first person recorded as meeting the risen Christ, surely a momentous event, was Mary Magdalene, a woman. After her joy at recognizing Jesus, she was sent by him to deliver a message to the fearful male disciples hiding in Jerusalem (John 20:14-18).

These accounts of women affirm both their gender and lives, and do not suggest they are second-rate or to be restricted to domestic activity.

Racism, which is also often passed on by culture, encourages inequality between people. It can affect us all in subtle ways revealed in how we might

automatically respond to a stranger who is of a different race from ourselves. Suffering a double abuse, Aboriginal women have related being treated as inferior because of both their gender and race.

In Acts 8:26-39, we have the amazing story of Philip being sent by the Spirit to help an Ethiopian eunuch travelling in his chariot. The man did not understand the prophet Isaiah's words he was reading. Ethiopia is in Africa, and we can assume that this man was black, yet he was singled out by God to be ministered to by Philip. We are told that he rejoiced to be baptized, and as a member of Christ he returned home, no doubt to spread the good news of Christ.

Let us express in our words and actions our belief in the God who cares about each one of us in our uniqueness and desires us to share in God's life of love for all eternity. May we as Christians encourage, respect and appreciate one another as fellow baptized children of God, members of Christ's body and inheritors of the kingdom of God.

Yes, we are all different, and that is great! Accepting difference leads to a life of wonder, joy, love and appreciation of *every* person and *all* creation. For everyone one and everything is embraced by our amazing, merciful and loving God, our creator, and the source of never-ending variety.

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