

How Should We Refer to
God?

A Question

“I know there is one God. But there is God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. When I am speaking about God, should I use the term, ‘He’ or ‘They’”?

How Should we Refer to God?

- Let the Bible be our guide

The Alternative: Speak of God However We Want

“Resolved, ... that the 79th General Convention direct the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music, as it considers revision of the Book of Common Prayer, to eliminate, when possible, all gendered references to God and to replace them with gender neutral language, and if necessary, to alternate gendered titles when referring to God.”

The Alternative: Speak of God However We Want

“Having studied much feminist theology in my masters’ degrees, I wrote a thesis on liberation and freedom and non-equality in feminist theology and existential counseling,” Calkins told the convention. “And I am still waiting for the Episcopal Church to come to the place where all people feel that they can speak God’s name...”

The Alternative: Speak of God However We Want

....Many, many women that I have spoken with over my past almost 20 years in ordained ministry have felt that they could not be a part of any church because of the male image of God that is systemic and that is sustained throughout our liturgies. Many of us are waiting and need to hear God in our language, in our words and in our pronouns.”

Exodus 20:7 (NKJV)

“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.”

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- There is one God

Deuteronomy 6:4–5 (NKJV)

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! **5**
You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart,
with all your soul, and with all your strength.

John 10:30 (NKJV)

“I and My Father are one.”

How Should we Refer to God?

- Let the Bible be our guide
- There is one God
- There are three Persons with the Divine Nature

Jesus is a Divine Being

Philippians 2:5–7 (NKJV) — **5** Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, **6** who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, **7** but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

The Holy Spirit is a Divine Being

Acts 5:3–4 (NKJV) — 3 But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie **to the Holy Spirit** and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? **4** While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but **to God.**”

How Should we Refer to God?

- Let the Bible be our guide
- There is one God
- There are three Persons with the Divine Nature
- The Divine Nature is not flesh and bones

The Divine Nature is not Flesh and Bones

John 4:24 - God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Luke 24:39 - Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.”

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John 3:16 (NKJV)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 1:1–3 (NKJV)

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.

John 16:12–13 (NKJV)

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. **13** However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak on His own authority, but whatever He hears He will speak; and He will tell you things to come.

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- God uses plural pronouns when referring to more than one Person of the Godhead

Genesis 1:26 (NKJV)

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

John 14:23 (NKJV)

23 Jesus answered and said to him, “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.

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- The Bible uses “they” in reference to “the LORD”

Genesis 18:1–9 (NKJV)

1 Then the LORD appeared to [Abraham]... **2** So he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, three men were standing by him; and when he saw **them**, he ran from the tent door to meet **them**, ... **3** and said, “My Lord, if I have now found favor in Your sight, do not pass on by Your servant. **4** Please let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. ... **They** said, “Do as you have said.” ... **8** So he took butter and milk ... and set it before **them**; and he stood by them under the tree as **they** ate. **9** Then **they** said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” So he said, “Here, in the tent.”

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Why is it important to respect people's PGPs?

- You can't always know what someone's PGP is by looking at them.
 - Asking and correctly using someone's preferred pronoun is one of the most basic ways to show your respect for their gender identity.
 - When someone is referred to with the wrong pronoun, it can make them feel disrespected, invalidated, dismissed, alienated, or dysphoric (or, often, all of the above.)
- Faculty training materials from Central Connecticut State University

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God cannot lie and will never ask us to lie either!

How Should we Refer to God?

- When referring the one Person of the Godhead, we should use the term, “He”
- When referring to more than one Person of the Godhead, the term “They” is appropriate