

Reckoning with God

Gary Henry

A well known Bible text says that “there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account” (Heb. 4:13). The thought conveyed by these words is as interesting as it is important.

Translators have variously handled the last part of the passage, the part which speaks of God as “Him to whom we must give account.” Consider these two versions: “him to whom we must explain all that we have done” (Taylor), and “him with whom we have to deal” (Phillips). Both Moffatt and the NEB have “with whom we have to reckon.” The familiar rendering in the KJV is “him with whom we have to do.” What does it mean to “have to do” with God?

The original language in this text is intriguing. The Greek may be literally translated “with whom (is) our account.” “Account” renders the noun *logos*, which in this instance means a computation or reckoning. Arndt & Gingrich comment that Heb. 4:13 speaks of our reckoning with God in His capacity as judge. When we speak of someone having to “face” a judge, we are not far from the thought of this text. To “face” a judge means to deal with him, to come to terms with the verdict he has a right to pronounce on one’s actions.

Actually, every person does “have to do” with God every day. Paul said to his audience of Athenian philosophers, “In Him we live and move and have our being” (Acts. 17:28). One may do little about it, one may refuse to acknowledge the fact, or even be unaware of it — but our Creator is nonetheless part of our lives every hour. He is the warp and woof of our existence, the very air we breathe. We can no more not have to do with God than a U.S. citizen can not have to do with the federal government. Given the reality of the situation, one can’t choose whether it will be that way, he can only choose whether he will “reckon” with the reality or not. The relationship is there, and even if one chooses not to “deal with it,” one has merely chosen a particular manner of dealing with it.

Modern man, of course, shrinks away from the concept of his accountability to God. Autonomy and independence — man assuming control of his own destiny and paying respect to no higher authority than himself — these are the ideas that are more congenial to the modern mind. “Disbelief” in God not infrequently stems from this reluctance to reckon with Him. As somebody has said, the atheist often can’t find God for the same reason the thief can’t find a policeman. The implications and consequences of “finding” God are not altogether what we wish them to be, so we evade the issue. But, in fact, God remains there to be reckoned with anyway!

Where an old-timer might say he had no “truck” with God, we would probably say that God is just not “relevant to our lifestyle.” Bill Gates, the wealthiest man in the country and one whose thinking is fairly typical of the culture, was asked in a recent interview whether he goes to church on Sunday. He replied that he does not because going to church is not efficient time management. But Gates, like many others, has left out of his calculations something that needs to be

calculated upon very deliberately. Man can't will himself out of the reality of a relationship to his Maker any more than he can will himself never to have been born. What is, is. The time is surely coming when every tongue will "confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:11). The inevitable, immutable truth is that we are accountable to God. Our hearts and lives are completely transparent to Him. A day of "reckoning" hastens inexorably toward us, a day when we will have to deal with the Creator. The person who will ultimately be prepared to reckon with God at that time is the person who reckons with Him on a daily basis in the here and now. It takes honesty and courage to do that, to say the least.