

articles and you still haven't begun. Maybe you feel guilty because you know you should have started the day you read the articles on discipline. These are all admissions that you know you have failed. This knowledge of your failings has turned your lack of discipline from a sin of omission into a sin of commission. The lack of discipline in your life may have before been something that you didn't realize until someone told you or you read something (last month) that pricked your heart. But now that lack of discipline is something that is firmly planted in the front of your mind. You can't not see it. So now your lack of response to this lack of discipline is a sin that you willfully commit.

There is no magic pill that you can take to fix this lack of discipline and it won't be any easier if you wait until tomorrow to begin. So, what should you do about it? You need to make every part of your life the subject of prayer and it needs to start immediately. You need to stop reading this article right now, get on your knees, and pray. "Father, forgive my lack of discipline. Work in me a heart that desires to have the work of salvation thou hast given me at the forefront of every aspect of my life, so that the life I live is one that lives out of this salvation to the glory of thy name. And that I live not for my own desires, but that I live a selfless life devoted to thee." By submitting all aspects of your life to God in prayer, he uses those prayers better to show you where you are lacking in discipline and clarify how you must change your way of living.

Maybe as you read each article last month, you felt indifferent. Maybe your response was: "I know I must live a life of spiritual discipline, but I'm still young yet. I'm still growing up. I am not spiritually

mature yet. Spiritual discipline will have to wait until tomorrow, or next year, or three years from now." As mentioned above, discipline will not get any easier tomorrow. The excuses for waiting for another time to begin are exactly what the devil wants. He wants you to buy into the idea that it is better to wait until tomorrow because that gives him another day to make easy work of you, his prey, while you ignore a life that would strengthen you to fight against him.

Maybe you are in a rut of despair when it comes to spiritual discipline. You are daily thinking about discipline, fighting against selfishness with that desire for holy living, but you feel like you are constantly taking two steps forward, only to fall back three steps. You know that there is no neutral in the Christian walk. It is either positive or negative. If you are not living a life of devotion to God and growing in discipline, you are backsliding.

Fear not, Christian!

Don't despair!

The fact that you are fighting to live a disciplined life is proof that you are indeed making a beginning in this direction. You know your own weakness, so you don't trust your strength, ability, or will power to accomplish anything in this. You trust in Christ. So, in the end, the only "magic pill" there is is Jesus Christ, the Great Physician. But it's not a pill you can buy and take as instructed. It's Christ's work of salvation that is already working in your heart, causing you to trust in him for all things, including a life of spiritual discipline. As Augustine read and responded in faith, so must we: "put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh."

Letters Austin Koole

Dear Rev. Langerak,

I write regarding your speech "Safety in the Ark" given at the 2019 Young People's Convention and recently published in the November issue of *Beacon Lights*. Upon reading and studying it again, I am reminded of a concern which came to mind upon hearing it as a conventioneer.

My concern rises from a portion of your speech not directly quoted in *Beacon Lights*, but one that I would like to quote for you now: "And when we say that Noah built the ark by faith, we mean God built

the ark. Man didn't build the ark; God did. That's because Noah built it by faith." My concern rises specifically from the portion of the quote in which you say, "Man didn't build the ark; God did." This portion of the speech, if you desire to listen to it, can be found at roughly the 20:00 mark of the recording posted by Mr. Kleyn.

Both while listening to the speech at convention, as well as while revisiting it in *Beacon Lights*, this section brought me to consider the application of this idea to the doing of our good works; for they

too are done out of a true faith in Jesus Christ. In your speech, you state that because Noah built out of a true faith, he did not truly build at all, but rather God did. As far as I am able to understand, this must also come to mean that because our good works flow out of a true faith in Christ, they too must not truly be our works, but God's. This idea I find difficult to comprehend and, respectfully, difficult to agree with.

If this is truly the proper way in which I should understand it, I ask how these works would yet be able to display our thankfulness to God. I believe that our thankfulness is seen in our obedience to his commands, an obedience that *we* are called to carry out. Later in your speech, following the aforementioned quote, you spoke on how the building of the ark revealed Noah's obedience unto God, with which I whole-heartedly agree. However, I take this to mean that Noah's obedience is seen in the work that *he* was called to do, and it can be seen in our lives as well in the works that we too are called to

produce. I recognize that we are only able to perform these good works due to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, but this does not take away from the fact that we are called to carry out and produce them. Philippians 2:12b–13 calls the believer to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

I ask if you agree that your statement (that a work of true faith is truly not the work of man at all, but a work of God) ought also to apply to the performing of our good works. And if this is the case, I ask for an explanation as to how a work of God himself, and not of man, can truly show the thankfulness of man for his salvation. If man in no way performs them, how can they truly be tokens of his thankfulness? And what then is the meaning of Lord's Day 32, Question and Answer 86, when it asks, “Why *must we* still do good works?”

Respectfully submitted,
Austin Koole

Letter of Response Rev. Nathan Langerak

Response

I thank Austin for his letter regarding my statement that it was God who built the ark, not man. To this statement Austin objects and also properly connects the statement with our good works: “As far as I am able to understand, this must also come to mean that because our good works flow out of a true faith in Christ, they too must not truly be our works, but God's...I believe that our thankfulness is seen in our obedience to his commands, an obedience that we are called to carry out...I take this to mean that Noah's obedience is seen in the work that he was called to do, and it can be seen in our lives as well in the works that we too are called to produce.”

Austin buttresses his position by an appeal to Philippians 2:12–13:

I recognize that we are only able to perform these good works due to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, but this does not take away from the fact that we are called to carry out and produce them. Philippians 2:12b–13 call the believer to “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you *both to will and to do* of his good pleasure.”

He writes a series of questions at the end of his letter:

I ask if you agree that your statement (that a work of true faith is truly not the work of man at all, but a work of God) ought also to apply to the performing of our good works. And if this is the case, I ask for an explanation as to how a work of God himself, and not of man, can truly show the thankfulness of man for his salvation. If man in no way performs them, how can they truly be tokens of his thankfulness? And what then is the meaning of Lord's Day 32, Question and Answer 86 when it asks, “Why *must we* still do good works?”

His argument is that if we say that a work done by faith is the work of God, not our work, then we are really making true obedience and thus true thankfulness impossible. Perhaps he misunderstands the point being made. The point is that a work of true faith is the work of God. It is the work of God in and through a man. Man cannot claim credit for that work. The man consciously works and does that work. It is God's work in and through him.

I would say the same for any of the works of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. God built the ark;

God moved Abraham from Haran to Canaan; God conceived Isaac in Sarah's womb; God blessed Jacob; God subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, stopped the mouths of lions; God was persecuted when his people were persecuted. I would say that for every great deed of righteousness that is recorded of God's people in the Old Testament. God slew Goliath, God tore out the gates and bars of Gaza and deposited them on a hill far away, and God pulled down the temple of Dagon. The issue is not that a man performs them. The issue is who gets the credit for that and how is man's performing them to be explained? The answer, in a word, is God. All of those works described above and all the works the believer performs by faith are impossible for man. It is impossible for a man to tear out the gates and bars of a city. It is impossible for a man to love his wife or for a wife to submit to her husband. But what is impossible for man is possible with God by a wonder of his grace through faith. By faith through grace God does it in and through them.

Objecting, Austin uses the word "but" where he ought to use the word "and." He writes, "I recognize that we are only able to perform these good works due to the work of the Spirit in our hearts, but this does not take away from the fact that we are called to carry out and produce them." He adds to that "but" the words "this does not take away from the fact that we are called to carry out and produce them." No, indeed, it does not. But the relationship between the Holy Spirit's work and our calling is different than he states. The work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts is the reason that we are called to produce good works.

We should be very careful where we use that word BUT so as not to create a disjunction where God did not put one, in order that God receives all the credit and glory for what we do, and so that our calling to do good works is properly grounded in God's work in us. With our good works we must be very careful that we do not present the situation this way: God gives all the grace that is necessary to perform the work, brings us to the point of performing the work, and calls us to perform the work, BUT man must also do it. We must not present the situation as though the truth that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts is somehow a threat to the calling and production of good works—as though that truth might take away from the fact that we are called to produce them. The word BUT is out of place in this instance, and really undoes everything that is said before it. So when Austin says that he acknowledges that we perform good works by the Spirit, and then says, BUT,

then he undoes in the next statement what he just acknowledged; and the main point becomes that we are called to and must produce good works, and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts may not be allowed to take away from that fact. The word BUT puts at odds two things that scripture and the creeds join together. The word BUT puts the emphasis on man. Man, then, is the decisive factor in performing the work and man, then, also gets the credit, even though there is a nod to divine grace.

Is there one in whom the Spirit works that does not produce good works? Is not the work of the Spirit in our hearts the very deepest explanation of our good works? Is this not the ground for the answer of the Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 32 to the question of why the redeemed Christian must still do works, to which Austin referred? We must still do good works, "Because Christ...also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image." We must do good works because doers of good works is what Christ makes us by his Spirit, and that is what he works in our hearts by that same Spirit so that as good trees we produce good fruit.

Over against the idea that saying that the Holy Spirit works in our hearts might take away from the calling to produce good works stands the very text that Austin quoted: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure." That statement stands as the ground for the believers' calling to "work out (his) own salvation with fear and trembling." The apostle does not say it is God who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure, BUT we are also called to and must produce good works. Nor does he say that it is God who works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure, but this does not take away from the fact that you are also called to produce them. Rather, he calls the believer to work out his salvation and grounds that calling in the work of God. All the believer is called to do is grounded in this reality: it is GOD who works in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure. There is no willing and there is no doing of the believer in any willing or doing of God's good pleasure that is not to be attributed to God. The apostle is saying whatever you do that is pleasing to God, whenever you work out your salvation with fear and trembling, know this, that it is God who works in you that willing and that doing. God gets all the credit and receives all the glory.

Nor does his statement that God works in you to will and to do of his good pleasure threaten or hamper his ability to call the congregation and people of God to work out their salvation. This also

harmonizes with what our Lord said in John 15:5: “I am the vine, ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

Regarding faith itself the Canons say in Heads 3/4, Article 14, “but because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of

believing also.” Are we to say over against this, BUT man also must believe and man is called to believe? Rather, we join them together. Man is rightly said to believe because God, who works all in all and who works in man to will and to do of his good pleasure, produces in man both the will to believe and the act of believing also.

Christian Living Philip Rainey

OFFICE OF ALL BELIEVER: RULING A KINGDOM

The previous article dealt with the idea of office in the kingdom of God. We saw that, being created in Adam to be officebearers, we shared the dreadful consequences of his fall, but that our office is redeemed in Christ. Christ is thus *the* officebearer in God’s kingdom and sharing his anointing we now function again as prophets, priests, and kings. Nothing less than being rulers in God’s kingdom is the astonishing privilege and calling of every believer. Young person, do you realize that as you do your schoolwork, learn your catechism, relate to your siblings, listen to the sermon, in fact in everything you do and everywhere you go, you are ruling a kingdom? That is exactly what Peter tells those Christians to whom he wrote—all of them: “But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation...” (1 Pet. 2:9). Every believer is a royal priest, a priest-king.

But now the question arises, “What is this kingdom over which I in the office of believer bear rule?” We have spoken much of the kingdom of God, but what is it? First of all, we must say what it is not. The kingdom of God is not an earthly kingdom. It exists in time and space and is found over the face of the earth, but it is not earthly. This means that its source is not of this earth. Originally, the kingdom of God was centered in a physical garden. As such, its king was the man Adam. But Adam was of the earth, earthy; now the second man, the Lord from heaven, is its king, and so the kingdom is heavenly in character. The kingdom is made up of those things that “[e]ye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

The kingdom is made up of those things that God has revealed to us by his Spirit, and thus it is a spiritual kingdom (1 Cor. 2:10).

At this point, you might be saying to yourself, “Hmm...a spiritual kingdom...is it then a real kingdom?” And the answer is most definitely. In fact, the kingdom of God (or the “holy nation”) possesses every characteristic of a kingdom. Think for a moment of the things that make up a kingdom or nation; all of these the kingdom of God possesses. It has a land: the heavenly Canaan. It has a king: Jesus Christ. It has a constitution: the Bible and the Reformed confessions. It has laws: the ten commandments. It has a government: the elders of the church. It also has an army: God’s people are soldiers who, clothed with the Christian’s armor, wield the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. O yes, the kingdom of God is a real kingdom all right. In fact, we may even say it is the real kingdom of which all the nations of the world are pictures; pictures not in the spiritual, ethical sense, but insofar as they exhibit the elements of rule.

The Bible identifies the kingdom with the church. Ephesians 1 tells us, in the context of his position at God’s right hand, that Christ is exalted to be head over the church (vv. 20–22). Here the idea of “head” is ruler or king. The kingdom of Christ is the church. Christ rules the church by his word and Spirit. This applies first of all to the local congregation, what we call the church institute. Your congregation is the kingdom of Christ, where the special offices represent Christ: the elders are kings, the deacon priests, and the minister functions especially as prophet.

As the kingdom of God, the local congregation