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THE ANALOGY OF FAITH AND ROM. 12, 6.

The "analogy of faith" may be defined as the full and perfect agreement with one another, and especially with the central doctrine of the Christian religion, of all the various articles of the Christian faith as revealed to us in the Bible.

Certain of our opponents have declared, and stoutly maintain, that this harmonious relation between the various teachings of the Gospel is apparent to human reason, and that the enlightened intellect of the trained theologian, at least, can perceive the same. But this is an error. For while the Bible teaches, plainly and unmistakably, that there neither is nor can be any real antagonism between its various statements, since "all¹⁾ Scripture is given by inspiration of God," 2 Tim. 3, 16, and since "the Scripture," therefore, "cannot be broken," John 10, 35, not even in a single word,²⁾ yea, not in a single letter:³⁾ yet this selfsame Bible teaches with equal clearness and positiveness that human reason, *in its present fallen state*, is by no means able to discern in every instance the aforesaid harmony, not though it may boast an enlightenment equal to that of the Church's most learned apostle. "We know in part," says that distinguished man of God, 1 Cor. 13, 8. Our knowledge is fragmentary. And the way in which he arrived at the knowledge he did possess of things divine he describes in the following manner: "Casting down imaginations" (or reasonings, λογισμούς) "and every high thing that exalteth itself

1) *Lit.*: every scripture.

2) See the context.

3) See Gal. 3, 16: πνεύματι — πνεύμασι.

BALAAM.

NUMB. 22.

(Concluded.)

No one that has been called by God into the kingdom of grace can expect days of ease and rest; on the contrary, he must be prepared to fight against the enemies of his soul, the devil, the world, and, above all, against his own corrupt flesh and blood. The rule is, that the greater the spiritual gifts are which a child of God has received the stronger are the temptations which befall him. But if God permits temptations to come upon His children, it is surely not with a view to let them sink and perish, moreover, they are intended to become for them a golden opportunity of growing in the true faith, in the knowledge and in the love of God. It is the storm-swept oak-tree that strikes its roots deeper and deeper into the ground, and it is the faith that is tried by manifold temptations which will become more and more rooted and grounded in the Word of God, if the one that is tempted does not himself hinder God's gracious purpose by his carnal security, spiritual stupor, and carelessness. St. Peter writes in regard to the manifold temptations which come upon God's people, 1 Pet. 1, 6: "Ye are now in heaviness through manifold temptations, that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." As gold is purified and refined in a furnace, so faith is to be tried and freed from dross, that is, from all kinds of expectations of earthly happiness and temporal welfare, that it may lay a firmer hold on the spiritual and heavenly gifts offered to us in the Word and in the sacraments. Therefore, if Balaam, the prophet, should also grow as to the inner man, he could not be and remain free from temptations, and if such came upon him it was certainly not God's aim and purpose that he should lose faith and grace through them, but that his faith and love and, in fact, all true virtues should abound in him. The temptation of which Moses tells us in the 22d chapter of Numbers came from a source which Balaam might have suspected least

of all, namely, from Balak, the king of the Moabites. The Israelites had just finished their wanderings in the wilderness and taken possession of the country east of the river Jordan, the former dominions of Sihor, the king of the Amorites, and of Og, the king of Bashan. Immediately after their victories over these kings and the conquest of their lands, Moses led them into the plains of Moab, where they pitched their tents opposite Jericho. The victories of Israel over the kings just mentioned had struck terror in the hearts of the nations round about, and when the Moabites saw that the mighty hosts of that nation had entered their territory, their fear and consternation knew no bounds. Moses says, v. 3: "Moab was sore afraid, because they were many, and Moab was distressed," or, rather, according to the original, disgusted (קִיַּץ מֹאָב; confer also Gen. 27, 46), "because of the children of Israel." Their disgust was the consequence of their fear, as the ו consec. with the imperfect tense indicates. The Moabites despaired of making any successful resistance to the powerful and victorious armies of Israel, thinking they were hopelessly lost, though without reason. For God had given orders to Israel not to make war on Moab nor to show any hostility against them, because they descended from Lot, the nephew and friend of Abraham, and it is hardly credible that Moses should not have informed them of this. Neither had the Israelites hitherto given any cause for complaint in their dealings with this nation. But the Moabites judged them evidently by themselves inasmuch as the Moabites would not have spared the Israelites, if they would have had the power to ruin them.

Balak, the son of Zippor, the king of the Moabites, shared the fears and apprehensions of his people. In spite of the apparent hopelessness of their condition he convened the foremost men of his kingdom, the elders of Moab, to deliberate on ways and means to check the dreaded advance of Israel. In this council were also present the elders of Midian, that is, the elders of those Midianites who had settled down in the neighborhood of the Moabitish kingdom. These Midianites

were, as appears from Gen. 36, 35 and Josh. 13, 2, no particularly warlike people, one of their favorite occupations being to carry on trade with other nations. Their caravans went down to Egypt already in the days of Jacob and Joseph, Gen. 37, 8, and they surely engaged also in a lively traffic with Mesopotamia, which bordered on the wilderness in which they lived. To the elders and princes of these Midianites Balak states his fears in the following words, v. 4: "Now shall this company," or multitude (הַחֵמָה), "lick up all that are round about us, as the ox licketh up the grass of the field." The imagery and rhetoric of these words at once betray the ruler of a half-nomadic and half-civilized nation, and remind us strongly, as Hengstenberg remarks, of the oratory of the Indians. But at the same time they show unmistakably that the consternation of these nations was indeed exceedingly great, and that they saw before their eyes nothing short of total defeat and extermination. The council which Balak had called together rejected all proposals to meet Israel at once in open warfare. Their numbers seemed too great, and no doubt those nations also perceived that the God of Israel was a strong God, much stronger than their gods, their idols. So they finally agreed to employ the services of one of the worshipers and prophets of this God against the invaders. This man was none else than Balaam, the son of Beor, the Mesopotamian. We presume that the proposition to send for him came from the Midianites. They were least of all inclined to resort to open warfare, and being traders, they knew more about the religion, name, and fame of Balaam than anybody else. Balak, however, and his princes gladly and willingly approved of this plan, and it was decreed to send for this great seer and engage his services against the formidable hosts of Israel.

But if these heathen purposed to employ the services of a servant and prophet of Jehovah against worshipers of the same God, they acted altogether in harmony with the superstitious notions and ideas of other pagan nations. The Romans, for instance, when investing a city or intending to take it by

storm, were accustomed to call out by charms and spells its tutelary gods, promising them the same or even a more sumptuous cult at Rome (Livius 5, 21 ff.; Macrob. Sat. 3, 5). Not being able, as stated above, to distinguish between the true God and His servants and a heathen priest and his idol, the Midianites and Moabites were given to the illusion that Balaam could also induce his God, by the arts of divination, to withdraw His favors from the people which had come out of Egypt, and to turn His favors to these nations which would buy the services of His prophet with gold and honors.

Balak now sends an embassy to Balaam consisting of elders of Moab and of Midian, v. 5. The clause, "to Pethor, which is by the river of the land of the children of his people," does not only describe the geographical location of that town or city, but is also to inform us that Balaam was a native of that country and no stranger. The message which these envoys were to deliver to Balaam was, vv. 5b. 6: "Behold, there is a people come out from Egypt: behold, they cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me. Come now therefore, I pray thee, curse me this people, for they are too mighty for me; peradventure I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land; for I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." This certainly was an exceedingly flattering invitation. The king of Moab condescends to make the Mesopotamian seer his friend and intimate. He complains to him, as his confidant, of the danger threatening him because of the great number and of the neighborhood of the camp of Israel. "They cover the face of the earth, and they abide over against me" (וְהוּא יֹשֵׁב כַּמָּוֶלִי). He expects that Balaam, by his curses, would and could accomplish what the combined forces of the Midianites and Moabites could not venture to do, that he could check the advancing columns of Israel. And by adding, "*Peradventure* I shall prevail, that we may smite them, and that I may drive them out of the land," he certainly does not wish to express any distrust in the power of Balaam's curses. Such an

assumption is excluded by the following assertion: "For I wot that he whom thou blessest is blessed, and he whom thou cursest is cursed." By the word "peradventure" (פֶּרַדְוֶנְטֻרָה) he tries to make the seer understand that he would be satisfied with less, if he would only come and render him some assistance to frustrate the evil designs of his enemies, but that, at the same time, he was expecting from the power of Balaam's curses nothing less than that they would enable him to rout the Israelites completely, and to drive their scattered bands back into the wilderness.

But Balak tries to win Balaam not only by smooth and flattering words. Moses relates, v. 7, that the elders of Moab and Midian departed with the wages or "rewards of divination." The heathen enchanters practiced their evil arts not only to gain honor and influence, but also to obtain gold and wealth. Many of them depended on their art for a livelihood. And since Balak, a blind heathen, judged the servants of Jehovah by his heathen standard and regarded Balaam as a magician and enchanter, only more skillful and powerful than others, he sent him the rewards of divination, gold and silver. This, he thought, must make him willing to accept his invitation without hesitancy and to procure for him his services.

Of course, what Balak sent through his messengers was only earnest-money, a promise and pledge of a much greater sum of gold and silver, if the seer would have been helpful to discomfit Israel by his maledictions. Indeed, this was a great and strong temptation, especially for a man that must have lived, like Balaam, in moderate circumstances. Many have denied their Lord and Savior for less money and smaller honors; Judas, a chosen apostle of the Lord, betrayed his Master for the paltry sum of thirty pieces of silver. Will Balaam stand the test? Has he armed himself with the sword of the Spirit to suppress the inordinate desires and cravings of his heart? Is he in prayerful communion with the Lord, and will he summon enough courage to tell the ambassadors of the heathen king frankly and boldly that he cannot and will not

come to curse this people, because it is blessed by the only, the true and the unchangeable God, who will not alter His will? Or is the temptation too great, does it go beyond the spiritual powers which the Lord had granted to the seer? However, great as this temptation was it was not too great for this prophet, who had been highly favored by God and received high spiritual gifts, to overcome it victoriously. What the apostle writes to the Corinthians, 1 Cor. 10, 13, applies also to the prophet: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." It is also true that many a one that has received less gifts at the hands of the Lord has overcome even fiercer temptations, and has suffered the loss of life, and endured the most cruel tortures rather than yield to sin and give himself up to iniquity. Do we not read of Moses, the contemporary of Balaam, Hebr. 11, 24: "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt," etc.? But in order to overcome such temptations and ward them off successfully, the believer must be constantly on his guard, he must continue in prayer and in the diligent use of the Word of God, and thus have his mind lifted heavenward and his eye fixed upon the glory and bliss which is reserved for the faithful children of God. He that neglects all this is in the greatest danger of becoming altogether disloyal and unfaithful to the Lord and denying Him, if some strong temptation comes upon him.

This must have been exactly the case with Balaam when the messengers of the Moabitish king knocked at his door. He, the prophet of God, who had often conversed with his God in visions or dreams, had become sluggish and careless in the service of God, and negligent in prayer and in the contemplation of the divine Word. Thus the evil hour suddenly overtakes

him. The envoys of Balak deliver their message and offer to him the gold which their king had sent. And Balaam loved the wages of unrighteousness, 2 Pet. 2, 16. In his heart, which for a time had not watchfully and devoutly pondered the Word of God, was stirred up at once greed and covetousness at the mention and sight of the glittering gold, and he was not ready to fight valiantly against this vice. Of course, we cannot altogether hinder evil desires to rise in our heart, nor could Balaam prevent this entirely; but a child of God that is vigilant will instantly see the approaching danger and hasten to meet the enemy with spiritual weapons. Balaam, however, is not ready for the struggle, and instead of taking a firm stand when the temptation approaches him, he wavers and tampers with sin, trying to serve two masters, God and mammon. The prophet does not tell the messengers without hesitation that he is the servant of Jehovah, and that He, the faithful covenant God of Israel, will not change His eternal counsels concerning that nation, and that for this reason he will not and cannot comply with the request of Balak. Nor would he tell them that the favors of the Most High are a thousand times dearer and more precious to him than all the favors of men and all the treasures of an earthly kingdom.

And now, what does the seer do and say? He says to the messengers: "Lodge here this night, and I will bring you word again, as the Lord shall speak unto me." Some modern interpreters are deceived by the seemingly pious words of the prophet, and consequently do not know how to deal with vv. 22—25. They think and claim that the heart of the man is still free from avarice, otherwise he would not have referred the matter to God. But this is certainly not the case. If the prophet knew who that people was, — and he undoubtedly knew it, — he also knew very well that if he gave the matter only one serious thought there was only one way to act, namely, to send the messengers away instantly with an appropriate answer. But Balaam is off his guard; he listens to his own corrupt flesh and blood more than to the Spirit within him. His heart

is charmed by the glitter of Moab's gold, wishing to possess as much of it as possible. He begins to picture to himself how happy he would be if he would have all the gold and honor which is to be his if he will but gratify the wishes of the Moabitish king. Yea, we may even surmise that the devil, who loves to pose as an angel of light, whispered into his ear: "O Balaam, how much good could you do with so much gold and silver! What a grand opportunity you would have of proclaiming the name of Jehovah, if you would become one of the most honored men at the court of a king!"

But Balaam, although he has entered on a downward course, has not yet altogether departed from the Word. The Spirit still strives with the flesh, and therefore he does not yet rise in open rebellion against the Lord and His will. He wants to ask the Lord the following night whether he could go, and communicate the result to the messengers of Balak. But the great church father Augustine says: "He is Thy true servant, O Lord, who approaches Thee not to hear what he wills, but to will what he hears." And Balaam certainly does approach the Lord in the hope of hearing what is pleasing to his own flesh and blood.

Moses relates, v. 9, that the Lord came to Balaam at night. He speaks of the appearance of the Lord as of a common occurrence in the life of the prophet, and suggests that the prophet had frequent intercourse with the Lord in the time previous to his apostasy. We are not told, however, whether the Lord appeared to him in a dream or in a vision. The latter is most probable. When the Lord came to men in a dream, He generally came quite unexpectedly, as in the case of Abimelech, Gen. 20, 3, and in the case of Laban, Gen. 31, 24. But here His appearance was expected. Besides this, we afterwards hear Balaam call himself "the one that saw the vision of the Almighty," Numb. 24, 4; but he never makes any allusion to the manifestation of God in a dream.

When the Lord appeared to Balaam, He asked him, "What men are these with thee?" He certainly did not ask this

question simply to open up the conversation, much less did He have to find out first who these men really were. It is a question similar to the one which the Lord put to Adam Gen. 3, 9. God knows it, but He wants Balaam to tell Him, in order to call his attention to the error of his way, that he might well consider the temptation that has come upon him. But passion has blinded the seer to such a degree that the question of the Lord does not embarrass him in the least. Without hesitation he reports to the Lord the message of the Moabite, vv. 10—12. The Lord answers him in three brief, concise sentences: "Thou shalt not go with them; thou shalt not curse the people: for they are blessed." He tells him at first not to go, but to stay at home. But since Balaam might offer to curse the people even at a distance, the Lord forbids him also expressly to curse that nation. These words alone should have sufficed to call Balaam back from the error of his ways and caused him to see that his heart was not in the proper relation to God. But the Lord spares no pains to plant true willingness to obey His commands even into the heart of an erring servant. Therefore He also gives the reason why He forbids Balaam to go with the ambassadors of Balak and to curse Israel. He adds: "For they are blessed." This was part of the blessing of Abraham, Gen. 12, 3: "And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse them that curse thee. And in thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed." The Lord reminds him of these words which He spoke to Abraham some six or seven hundred years ago, and certainly not without a purpose. Balaam should well consider that the Lord had blessed Abraham and his seed. His word, counsel, and will could not be changed. He, the ever faithful God, surely would not break His word and promise which He had given to Abraham, to gratify the inordinate desires of the heart of a man, though it be Balaam's. The same words contain also a solemn and urgent warning for the prophet. If he would curse this people, take sides against God's people, and thus against God Himself, that would, beyond question, mean ruin and destruction for his own person. But

if, on the other hand, he would continue to cast his lot with the people of God, such blessings would be surely his as neither Balak nor all the world could offer him. Oh, that Balaam would carefully consider these words and ponder them well in his heart! These words would lead him to true repentance and prove themselves a sharp weapon against all covetousness and ambition rising in his heart.

But Balaam does not heed these words sufficiently. It is true, he conforms with the letter of God's prohibitory order. He has not as yet sunk so low as to defy openly the Lord's will. He tells the messengers to return to their country without him, v. 13. But it behooves a servant of the Lord to obey willingly and gladly, as the psalmist says, Ps. 110, 3: "Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power." Balaam, however, does not bear a willing obedience to the Lord. He chafes inwardly under the restraint which God lays upon him. This appears from the words which he employs to tell the messengers of Balak why he will not comply with their king's request. He says: "For the Lord refuseth to give me leave to go with you." These words betray Balaam's deepest dissatisfaction with the will of the Lord. He as much as intimates to the messengers that he approved of their project and would have been very glad to serve them, but that, being a prophet, he could not go without having obtained permission from the Lord. For the present, therefore, he begs to be excused. Thus Balaam paves the way for another and stronger temptation, and renders himself a fair mark for the wily assaults of the devil. For the heathen messengers, who knew nothing of the relations of the true God to His prophet, could see nothing else in this answer than an encouragement to come back and try again. And these messengers, again, when they had returned to the court of Balak, did not give a complete account of the answer of Balaam, but simply reported: "Balaam refuseth to come." That it was Jehovah that refused to give leave to the seer they omitted, either because they thought it not worth while to mention, or because they believed this was in their own interest.

But how did Balaam pass the weeks or days which intervened between the departure of the first embassy and the arrival of the second? Moses tells us nothing about it. But one thing is sure, that these days or weeks were a respite for the prophet and a time of grace which the Lord granted to him to learn to know, first of all, that he was, as the church at Laodicea in the days of the apostles, "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked," Rev. 3, 17, in spite of his external compliance with the will of God. He should have "anointed his eyes with eyesalve," that he might again see clearly and distinctly, and should have prepared himself for the second temptation, which was to be expected, and for which he could blame nobody else but himself. These days undoubtedly were also a time of inward struggle and strife for him. His conscience undoubtedly was smiting him for actually encouraging Balak by his answer to send for him a second time. The Holy Ghost was striving with him and telling him: "O Balaam, how happy wast thou when thy heart was not yet distracted by greed and the love of money, when it was sincere with respect to thy God, and thy greatest delight was in the Word and will of God. Repent now, cast off the burden which thy waywardness has laid upon thee, break the yoke which greed and ambition have imposed upon thee, by the grace and power of God, and remember that the grace of God and life eternal are a thousand times better than all the gold and all the honors of the world." But Balaam's flesh and blood and the Evil One were also active and pictured to him the happiness he might enjoy if he had plenty of gold and silver, and that he might be one of the most influential men at the court of the Moabitish king. Was it not unjust on the part of God to jealously withhold such happiness from a man who had served Him faithfully, while the most wicked men were prospering, being rich and highly honored in this world? And alas! the prophet gives more room to his flesh than to the Holy Spirit; he listens more to the evil promptings of Satan than to the faithful warnings of God's Word and his conscience. That Balaam did not use the time of grace to his own true ad-

vantage we see by his subsequent conduct. If he would have used it aright, he surely would have come off victoriously in the second temptation.

Balak takes it for granted that Balaam's refusal to come was only a stratagem to obtain more favorable terms. He sends another embassy. Moses says, v. 15: "And Balak sent yet again princes, more, and more honorable than they." By the splendor of this delegation he wants to make an impression upon Balaam. He treats him as if he were a sovereign prince or the ruler of a great empire. His request is likewise more urgent than the first time: "Let nothing, I pray thee, hinder thee from coming unto me." And this urgent request is accompanied by the highest proffers. He promises to promote him to the highest honors. Balaam was to become one of the greatest men at his court, presumably next to himself in rank. Indeed, the king would do whatsoever Balaam would ask of him. The seer could dictate his own terms in everything, if he would only come and curse this formidable people, v. 17. From the following verse we may also infer that the king made him more liberal promises of silver and gold than before. To overcome such a fierce temptation surely takes a heart that is well grounded in God's Word and ready for a hot struggle against any foe of the soul's salvation. And in the beginning Balaam seems to stand his ground exceedingly well. When the messengers of the king had come to his house and delivered the answer of their sovereign, the prophet said, v. 18: "If Balak would give me his house full of silver and gold, I cannot go beyond the word of the Lord, my God, to do less or more" (לֹא עֲשֹׂה קִטְנָה אוֹ גְדוֹלָה). In great or small things he is bound to to what the Lord, his God, tells him, and is not at liberty to do anything of his own accord. Not all the silver and gold of Balak could induce him to disregard his Lord's will and Word. The most pious man could not have given a better answer. But even granted that these words were the expression of the prophet's resolution and will in that moment, his determination not to yield to the temptation was not strong nor deeply settled

in his heart. In the next moment his corrupt flesh prevails again. His heart vacillates anew and gives itself up to the illusion that the Lord might perhaps give him the permission to go, in spite of his first order. He again asks the elders of Moab and Midian to stay over night, that he might have an opportunity to find out what the Lord wanted him to do in this matter, v. 20.

In the 20th verse Moses relates that the Lord again appeared to Balaam at night. Behold the long-suffering and forbearance of the Lord! The Lord still tries to call back the straying sheep and does not altogether withdraw His hand from the blinded prophet, although he has more than deserved it. It is true, what the Lord tells him this time is first of all meant for a punishment of his continued waywardness, but this very punishment is at the same time another attempt of the Lord to bring the prophet to his senses. He says to him this time, v. 20: "If the men come to call thee, rise up and go with them; but yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." — We might ask here, How does this answer agree with God's immutability? Has God, after all, changed His will, in this case at least? First of all, we see from the latter part of God's answer that He has not changed His eternal decrees concerning Israel. Even if the prophet goes, he shall say whatever the Lord shall tell him, *i. e.*, he shall bless the people which is blessed and shall be blessed. Neither does the Lord find any pleasure in Balaam's journey to Balak's court, as we shall see from the following verses. But the Lord deals here with Balaam as a human father sometimes will deal with a son who is dissatisfied with his home and wants to leave the parental roof, no matter how well he is cared for there, and no matter how much the parents entreat him to stay. If all entreaties are in vain, the father will finally give his son leave to go, in order to have him find out by experience how foolish he is. In his heart, however, the father is greatly grieved at, and displeased with, the son's waywardness and foolishness. We have here an illustration of the distinction which the dogmaticians make

between the antecedent and consequent will of God. (Cf. Baier, *Comp.* I, p. 20, 3.) We also find verified here what the psalmist says, Ps. 18, 26: "With the froward Thou wilt show Thyself froward."

Balaam goes, v. 21. He rises up in the morning, saddles his ass, and goes with the princes of Moab who surely were proud of having carried their point. The verdict, however, which the apostle passes on the prophet's journey is: "He ran greedily after the error for reward," Jude 11. The love of money is the root of all evil.

Moses goes on to relate, v. 22: "And God's anger was kindled because he went." This does not seem to be in keeping with the permission the Lord had given to the prophet, yet after the explanation furnished above it is easy to understand this seeming contradiction. God had given him the permission to go, but at the same time He had said: "But yet the word which I shall say unto thee, that shalt thou do." This caution alone should have induced Balaam to give the matter more thoughtful consideration. And if the prophet had done this conscientiously and earnestly, he would soon have come to the conclusion that this permission was really a punishment for him. For how could he speak the word of the Lord and bless Israel, and at the same time win the favor of Moab's king? Would Balak not become filled with wrath against him, if he would come and yet not gratify his wishes? Such reflections would have revealed to the prophet the madness of his actions, and with the help of God they would have caused him to humble himself before God and repent. Then he would have asked God either for permission to stay at Pethor, or for divine guidance and assistance on his dangerous journey. But the blindness, yea, madness of the prophet is so great that he neither hears nor sees what the answer of God in reality means. So we cannot be surprised when we read that the anger of the Lord is kindled (וַיִּחַר אַף אֱלֹהִים). An interpreter remarks here very appropriately: "The sin of the sinner is not to be considered the less provoking to God because He permits it. We must not

think that because God does not by His providence restrain men from sin, He accordingly approves of it."

But though the wrath of the Lord is kindled, the Lord does not yet altogether cast him away. He wants to show him His wrath, but He does this still with the intention of opening his eyes and of calling him back from the road to perdition. And since the son of Beor had heretofore not listened to the voice of his own conscience nor to the word and voice of the Lord, the Lord resorts to a peculiar, yea, extraordinary way to make him see and understand. When Balaam was riding upon his ass on his way to the king of Moab, and his two servants and probably also the princes of Moab with him, "the angel of the Lord stood in the way for an adversary against him" (לַאֲדָוֶרֶת), "and his sword drawn in his hand." But nobody sees him, with the exception of Balaam's ass, which, frightened by the sight of the angel, "turned aside out of the way and went into the field." How is it possible that even the seer does not see the apparition while the ass sees it? Funke very pertinently remarks: "He that has experienced himself how blinded we are, if any desire, care, or hope has cast a spell upon us, will not ask why? In those days and hours when Balaam's mind was not yet preoccupied and was still capable for heavenly visions, it would have been an easy matter for him to behold the heavenly vision. But his only thought is now: How can I elude the word and will of the Lord and have my own way? Thoughts of avarice fill and disquiet his heart, air-castles upon air-castles rise up before his mind and collapse again, destroyed by the Word of God and his own conscience. His passion, his covetousness blinds his inner eye, and for this reason the prophet cannot see the angel. And it was likewise spiritual blindness which prevented also the men who were with the prophet to see the Lord's messenger.

But how was it possible for the ass to see the celestial form of light standing in the way with the flaming sword drawn in its hand? How this was possible we cannot explain, nor is it necessary to do so. There are many things between heaven

and earth which we are at a loss to explain, and still they are real, and their existence cannot be denied. Some interpreters have pointed to the so-called second sight as an analogous phenomenon. It is a well-known fact, they say, that not only men, but also animals have seen supernatural visions. Horses, for instance, whose riders saw some apparition have stood still suddenly, trembling and bathed in sweat, and could not be compelled to go any farther until the vision was over. Dogs are said to have set up a fearful howl when somebody died in the house, and birds which were caged in a room where some one drew his last breath have been seen fluttering about restlessly and full of fear. But the incident here recorded cannot be placed on the same level with the gift of the second sight. The Lord interposes here in a peculiar way and works a miracle just for this occasion. The ass, had never seen such sights before, as we may infer from v. 30, where she says to the prophet: "Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?" It was the Lord who opened her eyes, as He opened the eyes of the servant of the prophet Elisha, 2 Kings 6, 17. It is a miracle similar to the one related afterwards, v. 28, which also was wrought by the Lord in order to shame and rebuke the apostatizing prophet.

The turning of the ass out of the way fails to turn the attention of the seer to higher objects. He is so much infatuated with his prospective riches and honors that he does not see the cause of it. The only thing he does do is to beat his ass back again into the way. But the messenger of the Lord is not dismayed by the inattention of the prophet, v. 24. He stationed himself at a place where the path was narrow, leading between the walls of vineyards extending on both sides. The ass being frightened again, turns aside for the second time and presses the foot of the rider against one of the walls, vv. 24b. 25. Not even this could swerve the prophet from his ill-directed purpose. The bodily pain only arouses his anger so that he beats the poor animal again. A third encounter with the angel follows. This time he stood in a still narrower place where there was no room for the ass to turn "either to the right hand or to the left," v. 26.

Now she falls down under her rider, seeing no possibility to pass by the angel with the flaming sword. This time at least Balaam should have sobered down and tried to investigate the cause of her strange conduct, and the more so because the ass had never before acted that way. A little reflection would have taught him that there was something extraordinary in this, that the turning aside of his beast of burden a third time was not merely happening by chance, but that it was the Lord who wanted to stop him in his perverse way. But all this cannot awaken him from his spiritual stupor. His anger is kindled still more at the delay caused by the fall of the ass, and because his thoughts have been disturbed in such a manner. Unmercifully he smites the ass the third time, although she had done him the best service she ever did him, having saved him from the sword of the angel three times.

When God saw that all this would have no effect upon the prophet nor help to open his eyes, He resorted to some other means towards gaining His end. We read v. 28: "And the Lord opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam," etc. By means of a dumb ass God rebukes the madness of the prophet. She says to him, "What have I done unto thee that thou hast smitten me these three times?" The brute animal sighs and groans under the hard and unjust treatment of its owner, Rom. 8, 22. The ass gives utterance to her grief in intelligible speech. It might seem strange that Balaam is not startled and confounded by this miracle. But we need not be surprised at this. The thoughts of the prophet are still in the land of Moab and at the court of the king. His eyes are still dazzled by the glitter of Balak's gold, and his ears still deaf to everything that the Lord wants to tell him. Besides this, another passion is kindled in him, his wrath at the delay which he ascribes to the stubbornness of his beast of burden. And nothing makes man more dull and stupid than unbridled anger. In his fury he does not take notice of the strangeness of this miracle, and before he takes a second thought, he answers upon the reproaching words of his ass, v. 29: "Because thou hast

mocked me," or, Because thou hast made sport of me; and in the same breath he gives vent to his anger in the words: "I would there were a sword in mine hand, for now would I kill thee." The ass now begins to reason with him like a rational being. God had given her the faculty not only to speak, but to speak to a certain purpose. She reminded him of the fact that she was the ass upon which he had been accustomed to ride ever since she had come into his possession. She says: "Am not I thine ass upon which thou hast ridden ever since I was thine unto this day?" Her long service would certainly entitle her to a different treatment at his hands, even if she had stepped aside or fallen under him without any particular reason. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast," Prov. 12, 10. The ass asks furthermore: "Was I ever wont to do so unto thee?" and he is compelled to acknowledge that she never before had behaved in such a manner. She had always been gentle and had never given him any cause for complaint, much less for anger. If, therefore, to-day she steps out of the way, presses his foot against the wall, and falls down under him, there must be a special, an extraordinary reason for her conduct, and it would have been the prophet's duty to investigate the matter and to find out the cause of it, instead of striking her in his anger and to threaten to kill her in his passion and fury. These remonstrances sober the prophet down to some extent, and the state of his mind had at last become such that the Lord saw fit now to open his eyes.

The speaking of Balaam's ass has always been a great stumbling-block to human reason. Infidels laugh at this miracle and declare it to be altogether an impossibility, putting it down as merely a nursery-tale. They take occasion therefrom to ridicule the whole Bible. A book, they say, which demands an intelligent person to believe that a brute, and an ass at that, spoke, deserves no credit whatever and cannot be relied upon. Such talk, however, sounds strange in the mouths of people who, as a rule, are given to the grossest superstitions and are perturbed and duped by the most absurd stories, if they only come

from the lips of spiritualists and their kindred. But since these people are altogether blinded and ruled by the devil, their lord and master, it is absolutely useless to argue with them on such things.

This narration, however, has been a stumbling-block not only to infidels but also to a good many that profess Christianity and wish to be regarded as good Christians, and even enjoy the reputation of being pillars of the Church. In various ways have they tried, especially interpreters and learned men, to remove the offense which corrupt human reason takes at this story. Some more recent writers who took exception to this passage simply declared that this part of the narrative was interpolated at a later period. This is surely a radical way of dealing with real or imaginary difficulties and demands neither faith nor any exertion of the brains. The Berleburger Bible, in the main the work of the enthusiast Haug, treats the story of Balaam's ass as an allegory, in order to deal a blow at "the dead orthodoxy." "The ass upon which the false prophet rides is the poor, common people in the congregation, upon whom he rides and whom he tyrannizes, if they refuse to obey his will. . . . But the ass, the poor people, sees the angel sooner than the ambitious and infuriated prophet . . . ; the simple and ignorant people often know and see more in spiritual things than the great and learned rabbis," etc. This sounds witty and is well invented, but is far from being sound exegesis. Besides, it would be easy for us to furnish proof for the assertion that enthusiasts of the type of Haug, and, in fact, all heterodox ministers, always have been harder on their followers than the orthodox preachers of the Gospel, if they only had the power and the opportunity. They are the men that bring the Christians into bondage, devour them, and smite them on the face, 2 Cor. 11, 20.

Other interpreters believe that they are able to solve the difficulty by assuming that the ass did not actually speak, but simply produced natural animal sounds indicative of grief and complaint, and that in the mental ears of the prophet these

sounds were transformed into intelligible human words. In their opinion it is not a miracle of speech, but of hearing. The most prominent advocate of this theory is Hengstenberg. In his book, "The History of Balaam and His Prophecies," he devotes seventeen pages to this theory and tries to make it plausible to the reader that the miracle is not to be considered an external, but an internal one. From all that he says it appears that he also takes offense at the miracle, while, at the same time, he does not want to deny it for fear of losing his reputation of being an orthodox theologian and of contradicting his own doctrine of verbal inspiration. His interpretation does not rest on sound exegetical principles; it is arbitrary and cannot satisfy the heart of the simple Christian who bows before the authority of the inspired Word of God.

In the face of all the attacks made against this passage by unbelievers, as well as by Hengstenberg and such as embrace his views, no matter what position they occupy in the Church, we abide by the simple report of the great prophet Moses, firmly believing that Balaam's ass really uttered intelligible human words. And we have the most weighty reasons for doing so. The first impression which any one receives when he reads this passage is, that God, for a moment, bestowed upon the ass the gift of speech, and only a mind that is prejudiced will try to find something else in these words. Moreover, Balaam's mind just then was not in such a condition as to be fit to see inner visions, as Hengstenberg and others would have it, much less was he in a rapture. On the contrary, his mind was entirely absorbed in the pursuit of wealth and honors, and it was the speaking of the ass that brought him back again to consciousness and qualified him again, in a measure, for the vision of supernatural things. Furthermore, Moses nowhere intimates that the cries uttered by the ass only sounded like human words, but in words that cannot be misunderstood he says that the ass spoke twice. If we would raise the objection that Balaam was not startled or surprised at the speaking of the ass, and thence draw the inference that he regarded this only as some mental

vision, as something that took place in his mind, we venture to say that this objection is without any foundation whatever. There are conditions of the heart when the greatest miracles have no effect upon it. Take for example the scribes and the Pharisees. They were eye- and ear-witnesses of the greatest miracles of the Lord. Quite a number of them, for instance, were present when the Lord raised Lazarus from the dead. Yet they would not believe and only hardened their hearts. For a similar reason the companions of Balaam perceived nothing or little of the miracle. They were like the companions of Paul, Acts 9, 7, or like the people that said it thundered when a voice came from heaven, saying: "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again," John 12, 28. 29. It is therefore ill-seasoned policy to make this wonder palatable to the unbelievers by all kinds of spiritual interpretations. Such practices please the old Adam, but they fail to create and strengthen faith. We must understand these words as every child would understand them. The Lord gave the ass the faculty of speech for this occasion, while at the same time she did not cease to be an ass. Only this interpretation comports with the high dignity and majesty of the Word of God; all other explanations shake our faith in the truthfulness and perspicuity of Holy Writ. If we deny this miracle, we must also deny others, for instance, that of Jonah and the whale, the turning of water into wine, or the miraculous feeding of the five thousand. And how could we believe that the devil made the serpent his tool and mouth-piece, Gen. 3, if God could not open the mouth of Balaam's beast to rebuke the prophet for his madness? And what does the New Testament say? The New Testament is the interpretation of the Old, and Peter, the great apostle of the Lord, writes of Balaam, 2 Pet. 2, 16: "But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass *speaking with man's voice* forbade the madness of the prophet" (*ὑποζύγιον ἄφωνον ἐν ἀνθρώπου φωνῇ φθεγξάμενον ἐκόλυσε τὴν τοῦ προφήτου παραφροσύνην*). "The dumb ass spake with man's voice," it uttered human, intelligible words, which were also to a purpose: this is the verdict of the

highest court to which we can appeal on this earth, and who-soever rejects this decision cannot expect that a Christian argue with him any further.

After the thoughts of the seer had been interrupted in such an extraordinary and miraculous manner and the Lord had sought to stir up his conscience even by the reproach of his ass, He opened his eyes, v. 31. He saw now what his beast had seen before: "the angel of the Lord standing in his way, and his sword drawn in his hand." As soon as Balaam saw the heavenly vision, "he bowed down his head and fell flat upon his face," *i. e.*, he fell down upon his knees so that his face touched the earth. This is the meaning of קָרַר in connection with הִשְׁתַּחֲוָה, one of the two verbs mostly followed by אֲפִים אֶרֶצָה or אֲפִין, or אֶרֶצָה. Ex. 34, 8; 1 Sam. 24, 9; Gen. 24, 26; Ex. 4, 31, etc. Thus Moses bowed down his head toward the earth and worshiped when the Lord passed by before him and proclaimed: "The Lord God, merciful and gracious," etc. Balaam did this partly to show reverence to the Lord, who wanted to speak with him through His messenger, partly out of fear, seeing the sword of vengeance in the hand of the angel. As the ass had done before, so the angel now reproves the seer for his outrageous conduct, v. 32: "Wherefore hast thou smitten thine ass these three times?" Then he proceeds to show him the reason why his ass had turned aside. It was not stubbornness on the part of the beast, but the prophet himself was to be blamed for it. His way was perverse before the Lord, and the Lord had placed His angel in his way to show him that he was displeased with his journey. The prophet even owed his life to his ass, for if she would not have turned aside, the angel would have slain him and kept her alive.

We ask now, What was the object of all the strange and wonderful things that happened there? The answer is, The Lord did not simply want to show His creative power and fill the mind of the seer with awe and fear, but His intention was to shame and humble him. Balaam was to consider first of all that the Lord could give the faculty of seeing heavenly visions

not only to men like him, but also to brutes, if He chose to do so, and make them His instruments. It must have been exceedingly humiliating for the prophet to see and hear how God even used a beast to rebuke him with a man's voice, and thus call his attention to his disobedience and the error of his ways. This deep humiliation should cause him to remember how deeply he had fallen and how far he had departed from the way of righteousness. Yea, all these strange things which had happened to him were another loud call to repentance, and if he had heeded this call and permitted the Spirit of the Lord to work in his heart, he also soon would have seen in these incidents the great love and forbearance of God who still was endeavoring to save his soul from perdition, although He had tried it in vain before.

And what should Balaam have done now? He should have cursed his ungodly greed and his shameful waywardness and considered it the greatest favor if, even at this juncture, God would have given him permission to return and thus to evade the temptations of Balak. He ought to have gone down on his knees, imploring God not to direct him to continue this dangerous journey, and surely he would not have asked in vain. And indeed, it seems again that Balaam's heart was changed. He said, v. 34: "I have sinned." There is nothing that pleases the Lord more than these three brief words, if they are the outcry of a truly contrite heart. David's confession, 2 Sam. 12, 13: "I have sinned," came from such a heart, also that of the publican in the temple, when he smote upon his breast and said, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" But Pharaoh had also said to Moses, Ex. 9, 27: "I have sinned," and yet he was not truly sorry for his disobedience towards God. It was simply the fear of God's punishments which forced this confession from his lips, and as soon as the judgment of God was received, he was as secure and stubborn as ever. And he resembles the Egyptian king more than the king of Israel or the sorrow-stricken publican in Jehovah's temple. He proceeds to say: "For I knew not that thou stoodest in the way against me."

He ascribes his sin merely to his ignorance and not to his perverted will. Instead of acknowledging that he had set his will against the Lord and followed his own wicked heart, making light of all the cautions of the Lord; instead of owning that he has justly deserved the wrath and punishment of God, he tries to excuse and extenuate his disobedience. He adds: "Now therefore, if it displease Thee, I will get me back again." This is additional proof that Balaam was far from being truly penitent. He offers to go back, if the Lord gives him the express command to return, but a thousand times rather would he continue his journey and get the reward which was held out to him.

But God is not satisfied with a counterfeit observance of His will. Only willing obedience is pleasing to Him. And because He sees no true willingness in the heart of Balaam to return and forego the gold and honors of the Moabitish king, the angel tells him to accompany the men, adding, however, as the Lord had done v. 20: "But only the word that I shall speak unto thee, that thou shalt speak." This is a renewed protest against Balaam, but at the same time it sounds like a prediction, that though he would have his way in going to Balak, he could nevertheless not do as he pleased. In spite of his unwillingness, he would be an instrument in the hands of God to further the interests of His kingdom, in the end, however, to be cast away as a useless vessel and a vessel of wrath.

So Balaam went with the princes of Balak—sore and wounded in his heart, but ruled at the same time, more than ever before, by the two tyrants, Avarice and Ambition. He went to bless the people of God, but also to finally call down upon himself the judgments of the Most High.

Meanwhile Balak had heard of his coming. Full of joy, and anxious to neglect nothing that might please Balaam and make him the more zealous to serve him, he hastens to the city of Moab, which was situated on the utmost border of his country, to meet him there, v. 36. When they met, the king first reproached Balaam, though in a friendly manner, for not having followed his first call, and told him that he was sorely mis-

taken, if he had thought that he was not able to promote him to high honors, v. 37. The king does not in the least suspect the real cause of Balaam's first refusal to come. Nevertheless he is glad the seer has come now, and confidently expects that he will curse the dreaded enemy and thus help to discomfit and ruin him. But Balaam instantly dampens the ardor of Balak's hopes and expectations. He says to him, v. 38: "Lo, I am come unto thee: have I now any power at all to say anything? The word that God putteth in my mouth, that shall I speak." He speaks doubtfully of the issue and bids Balak not to depend too much on him. What he could do he already has done by coming to him, and he would also gladly have cursed Israel, but as the servant of Jehovah and His mouthpiece he cannot speak what he pleases, but must utter the words which the Lord puts in his mouth.

We notice the great vexation which these words of Balaam betray. Such are the wages of the service of sin. First the service of sin promises pleasure, joy, and happiness. But soon it is attended by all kinds of difficulties, adversities, remorses, sorrows, and disappointments, the more so, if the sinner tries to keep up a show of godliness, like Balaam. Solomon says, Prov. 11, 31: "Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth: much more the wicked and the sinner."

Without delay the king takes the seer to Kirjath-huzoth, a city which probably lay at the foot of the mountain Bamoth-Baal, from where the latter was to see and curse the people of Israel. There Balak offers a sacrifice, v. 40. This undoubtedly was not a sacrifice of thanksgiving for the safe arrival of Balaam, but a sacrifice of supplication for the success of the enterprise just begun. The king addresses himself as speedily as possible to the business. It is also more than probable that this sacrifice was not offered to the gods of Moab, — they play no part whatever in the whole affair, — but to the God of Israel. Balak wants to alienate Jehovah from Israel in connection with Balaam, and win His favor and protection for himself. If the king treats Balaam and the princes that were with him with

a feast upon the sacrifice, it was in accord with his promise: "I will promote thee unto very great honor," v. 17. Already the next morning, in order to lose no time, the king takes Balaam in his chariot "to the high places of Baal," on to Bamoth-Baal. He evidently does not take him there because this place was consecrated to Baal, but because, being so high, it would give him a convenient prospect of the camp of Israel. Balak thought that Balaam must be able to see the people he wants him to curse, if his curses were to have any effect. The seer, however, is more solicitous now to please the heathen king than ever before, and is intoxicated with the honors which are showered upon him. — O that we may learn from this sad example how dangerous it is to tamper with sin and not to resist the first beginnings! How necessary for us to pray every day: "Lead us not into temptation!"

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