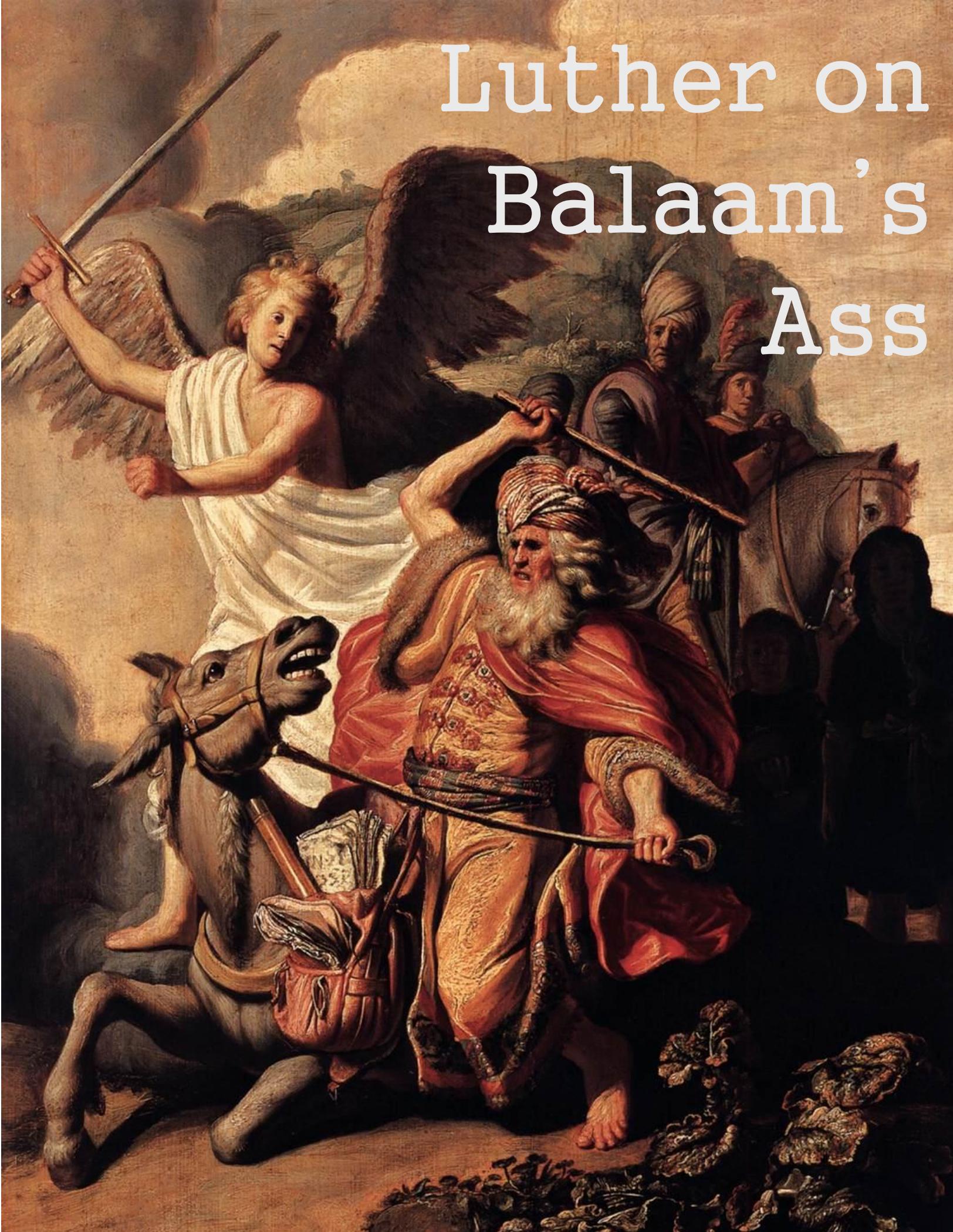


Luther on Balaam's Ass



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In his writings, Luther referred repeatedly to the story of the prophet Balaam and his donkey or ass in order to stress that God can speak through the most humble and insignificant of people whom the world views with contempt, and in ways that are entirely contrary to what people would expect from a God of unsurpassable power and glory who reigns supreme over all.

Here are some quotes on the subject taken from *Luther's Works*.¹ In many of these passages, Luther's words are extremely harsh and may appear to be anything but Christian and loving if read out of context. But it must be remembered that Luther had been excommunicated as a heretic for proclaiming the gospel that he had found in the Scriptures and that others in his day, including the pope, the church hierarchy, the civil authorities, and many self-proclaimed prophets were claiming that all must submit to them as God's unique spokespersons. From Luther's perspective, this was blasphemous, since they were equating their own words with those of God, as if they were one and the same. On this basis, they then took control of people's lives and possessions, enslaving them in body and soul by demanding absolute obedience of them, leaving them impoverished and at times even destitute, and destroying their lives in many ways. And what was most appalling of all was that they justified this enslavement, thievery, and devastation in God's name.

¹ *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav J. Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehmann; Philadelphia: Fortress Press; St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955-1986), 55 vols.

When Luther raised his voice in livid protest, they condemned him and those who shared his outrage and indignation as devils and "damned heretics." Only when we have grasped what was going on can we understand why Luther spoke with such rage and virulence.

Luther did not seek to exalt himself above such authority figures or make the claim that it was he rather than they who represented God as God's unique spokesperson. Instead, he insisted that any who spoke in conformity with the gospel, including not only himself but others as well, were to be heard rather than despised, though of course he consistently maintained that it was necessary for all believers to judge for themselves as to whether or not the word spoken was actually that of God. For this reason, he felt it was vital for people to be able to read Scripture in their own language.

Commenting on 2 Peter 2:15-16 (LW 30:184-87)

Forsaking the right way they have gone astray; they have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Be'or, who loved gain from wrongdoing, but was rebuked for his own transgression; a dumb ass spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness.

When the children of Israel had departed from Egypt and came into the land of the Moabites, King Balak sent messengers to a prophet in Syria, named Balaam, and asked him to come and curse the Jewish people, in order that they might become weak and he

could defeat them. Then God came to Balaam and forbade him to curse the people. Therefore the prophet refused to go with the messengers. Then the king sent messengers to the prophet again and promised to reward him richly; and God permitted him to go to him, but He ordered him not to say anything except what He would tell him.

Then Balaam set out and rode on an ass. Now the angel of God appeared on the road and stood before him "with a drawn sword in his hand." The ass saw this "and turned aside out of the road." Then Balaam struck the ass to turn her into the road. At this juncture the angel stood in a narrow place in the road, where the ass could not turn aside. She pressed against the wall and bruised the prophet's foot, and she had to fall on her knees under Balaam. This made Balaam angry, so that in his rage he struck her with his staff. Then God opened the beast's mouth, so that she spoke with a human voice and said: "What have I done to you that you strike me this way?" Then Balaam said: "I wish I had a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you." The ass answered and said: "Am I not your ass, upon which you have ridden all your lifelong to this day? Was I ever accustomed to do so to you?" Then the prophet's eyes were opened, and he saw the angel with the drawn sword. He became frightened and wanted to go back. The angel commanded Balaam to proceed. At the same time, however, he ordered Balaam not to say anything else than what he would tell him....

When St. Peter speaks here about this, he wants to say that our clerics are really the children and disciples of Balaam. For just as Balaam gave the evil advice to erect an idol, so that the children of Israel were induced to sin,

made God angry, and were smitten, so our bishops have also erected an idol in God's name, namely, their human doctrine of their own works. They abandon faith and seize the Christian souls. These they ravish, and in this way they arouse God's anger, so that He has punished the world with blindness and impenitence. We can thank our spiritual junkers for all this.

Thus Peter actually compares these false teachers to the prophet Balaam; for, like Balaam, they establish such idolatry and destroy souls. Furthermore, his real name is fitting; for in Hebrew Bileam or Balaam denotes one who devours or who squanders on drink, one who opens his jaws and devours and consumes everything. Balaam bore this disgraceful name because he caused so many people to sin, so that they were slain and perished. Our bishops and clergy are Balaamites of this kind. They are the devil's jaws with which he seizes and devours innumerable souls. But this prophet's surname was *filius Bosor*, which means "flesh" or as Moses says *filius Beor*, that is, "of a fool." His father is a fool. Thus these, too, are blind, mad, and foolish people. They themselves need to be ruled. The flesh gives birth to such people, for the spirit produces people who are different. Thus God has given them their real name in Scripture and has portrayed them in this way in order that we may know what to think of them.

Now the dumb beast of burden, the ass, stands for the people, who permit themselves to be tamed and ridden, and who go blindly as they are led. Just as the ass was urged on and hit hard when it turned aside on the narrow path and had to return to the road until it could no longer evade the angel or

turn aside and had to fall down, so the seducers have driven the people. Then the people found this unbearable and realized that the treatment they received was not right. They wanted to turn aside. But the might with which the people were oppressed was too great. Finally God opened our mouths and put words into them so that even the children talk about it. In this way their folly was revealed, and they had to be ashamed. With this one should confront them when they come along and say that it is not proper for the laity to read Scripture and talk about it, but that one should listen to what the councils decree. Then you can answer: "Did not God speak even through an ass? Be satisfied with our admission that you preached God's Word in times past. But now that you have become fools and are in the grip of greed, why is it surprising that now the common people are being awakened by God and are beginning to speak the truth, which was burdened and weighed down by you like a dumb beast of burden?" This is the comparison to the prophet Balaam.

Luther at the Leipzig Debate²

[In 1519, Luther debated John Eck, a theologian from the University of Ingolstadt, in Leipzig. Eck had become an ardent opponent of Luther and wished to see him branded as a heretic. During the debate, they touched on a number of subjects, before coming to that which had occasioned Luther's 95 Theses:]

Then they took up indulgences, and there was scarcely any debate. Eck declared that if Luther had not assailed the papal primacy,

their differences could easily have been composed. On the subject of penance, however, Eck kept pressing Luther with the query, "Are you the only one that knows anything? Except for you is all the Church in error?"

"I answer," replied Luther, "that God once spoke through the mouth of an ass. I will tell you straight what I think. I am a Christian theologian; and I am bound, not only to assert, but to defend the truth with my blood and death. I want to believe freely and be a slave to the authority of no one, whether council, university, or pope. I will confidently confess what appears to me to be true, whether it has been asserted by a Catholic or a heretic, whether it has been approved or reproved by a council."

To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation Concerning the Reform of the Christian Estate (LW 44:135-36)

We ought to become bold and free on the authority of all these texts, and many others. We ought not to allow the Spirit of freedom (as Paul calls him [II Cor. 3:17]) to be frightened off by the fabrications of the popes, but we ought to march boldly forward and test all that they do, or leave undone, by our believing understanding of the Scriptures. We must compel the Romanists to follow not their own interpretation but the better one. Long ago Abraham had to listen to Sarah, although she was in more complete subjection to him than we are to anyone on earth [Gen. 21:12]. And Balaam's ass was wiser than the prophet himself [Num. 22:21-35]. If God spoke then through an ass against a prophet, why should he not be able even now to speak through a righteous man against the pope? Similarly, St.

² Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1950/1978), 91-92.

Paul rebukes St. Peter as a man in error in Galatians 2[:11-12]. Therefore, it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error.

Defense and Explanation of all the Articles (LW 32:9-10)

Even in the New Testament, have not the true bishops and teachers been rare indeed? St. Ambrose was alone in his day; after him, St. Jerome and St. Augustine. Furthermore, God did not choose many eminent and great bishops for this work. St. Augustine was bishop in one little unimportant city, but did he not accomplish more than all the Roman popes with all their fellow-bishops? They cannot hold a candle to him. Moreover, it is a fact that all heresies have been started, or at least have been encouraged, by bishops and scholars. If they were unreliable at a time when they were better, more learned, and more diligent, why shall we trust them now when they no longer even serve the church and have become secular lords? Do we insist on being blind?

I do not claim to be a prophet, but I do say that the more they scorn me and the higher they regard themselves, the more reason they have to fear that I may be a prophet. God is marvelous in his works and judgments. He pays attention neither to numbers, greatness, cunning, or power. As Ps. 138[:6] says: "The haughty he knows from afar." And even if I am not a prophet, as far as I am concerned I am sure that the Word of God is with me and not with them, for I have the Scriptures on my side and they have only their own doctrine. This gives me courage, so that the more they despise and persecute me, the less I fear them.

There were many asses in the world in the days of Balaam, but God spoke only through Balaam's ass [Num. 22:28]. He says in Ps. 14[:6] to these same prominent men: "You have confounded the sound doctrine of the poor preacher because he trusted in God," as if to say that because he is not great and high and mighty, his doctrine must be false in your eyes.

They say also that I propose new ideas and it is not to be expected that everybody else should have been so long in error. That, too, the ancient prophets had to hear. If length of time were sufficient proof, the Jews would have had the strongest kind of case against Christ on that ground. His doctrine was different from any they had heard for a thousand years. The Gentiles, too, would have been justified in regarding the apostles with contempt, since their ancestors for more than three thousand years held to a different faith. There have been murderers, adulterers, and thieves since the beginning of the world, and will be to its end. Does that make their actions right? I preach nothing new, but I say that all Christian things have perished among the very people who ought to have preserved them, namely, the bishops and scholars. But I have no doubt that the truth has been retained in some hearts to this day, if only in the hearts of infants in their cradles. In Old Testament times also, the spiritual understanding of the law was retained among some of the common people, though it was lost by the high priests and the learned who ought to have preserved it. Thus Jeremiah says [Jer. 5:4f.] that he has found less understanding and justice among the leaders than among the laity and the common folk. Likewise today, poor peasants and children understand Christ better than pope, bishops, and doctors.

Explanation to the 95 theses (LW 31:194)

According to the prophet we ought to place our hope in Christ's word, not in our penitence. The Psalmist did not say, "Remember my contrition to thy servant, in which thou hast made me hope," but "Remember thy word ... in which thou hast made me hope" [Ps. 119:49]. Again he says, "In thy word [certainly not in our own work] have I placed great hope" [Cf. Ps. 119:81]. In another psalm he says, "My soul is sustained by his word," etc. [Cf. Ps. 130:5]. And according to the Hebrew he says in Psalm 51[:4], "Against thee, only, have I sinned, ... wherefore thou wilt justify me by thy word." Therefore it is neither the sacrament nor the priest, but faith in the word of Christ spoken through the priest and his office which justifies you. What difference does it make to you, if the Lord should speak through an ass, either male or female, as long as you hear that word by which you may hope and believe?

Commentary on John 6:47 (LW 23:97-98)

This is also the significance of the words which Christ now quotes from the prophet Isaiah: "And they shall all be taught by God" (Is. 54:13). He declares, as it were, that whoever would be a member of Christendom and be called a member or disciple of Christ must simply hear God Himself. And how do I hear Him? How am I instructed by Him? A schismatic spirit withdraws into some nook, gapes, neither reads nor listens, but waits for God to speak with him. He waits for the Spirit to appear, and he says: "Oh, this is what it means to be taught by God!" Yes, the devil is standing on your head! No, to be taught by God Himself means to heed the Word of Christ, to learn from Him, and then to feel

convinced that it is God's Word. This is hearing God Himself. And even though you were to hear an ass speaking, as Balaam did (Num. 22:28), it would nonetheless be God's Word. Thus when you hear a sermon by St. Paul or by me, you hear God the Father Himself. And yet you do not become my pupil but the Father's, for it is not I who is speaking; it is the Father. Nor am I your schoolmaster; but we both, you and I, have one Schoolmaster and Teacher, the Father, who instructs us. We both, pastor and listener, are only pupils; there is only this difference, that God is speaking to you through me. That is the glorious power of the divine Word, through which God Himself deals with us and speaks to us, and in which we hear God Himself.

Temporal Authority: To What Extent it Should Be Obeyed (LW 45:121)

I am satisfied simply to point out that it is not impossible for a prince to be a Christian, although it is a rare thing and beset with difficulties. If they would so manage that their dancing, hunting, and racing were done without injury to their subjects, and if they would otherwise conduct their office in love toward them, God would not be so harsh as to begrudge them their dancing and hunting and racing. But they would soon find out for themselves that if they gave their subjects the care and attention required by their office, many a fine dance, hunt, race, and game would have to be missed.

Second. He must beware of the high and mighty and of his counselors, and so conduct himself toward them that he despises none, but also trusts none enough to leave everything to him. God cannot tolerate either

course. He once spoke through the mouth of an ass [Num. 22:28]; therefore, no man is to be despised, however humble he may be. On the other hand, he permitted the highest angel to fall from heaven; therefore, no man is to be trusted, no matter how wise, holy, or great he may be. One should rather give a hearing to all, and wait to see through which one of them God will speak and act.

Preface to Commentary on Psalm 101 (LW 13:146-47)

This psalm is one of those which praise and thank God for the secular authorities, as is also done in Psalms 127 and 128 and in many others. Together with other psalms, this one has always been sung in the church by the clergy, who claimed that they alone were the church and the holy, favored people of God. But they did not realize or consider at all that in these psalms they were praising the very group with their mouth which they daily treated with utter contempt and practically trampled under their feet. Had they understood these psalms, I really think they would have omitted them and would never have sung them. It certainly makes no sense for these holy people to praise and commend the secular authorities publicly in the church. In comparison with their position they have treated these authorities with contempt, and that for the sole reason that they would have liked to see themselves alone be masters on earth and all other leaders become monks. And in this they have truly succeeded, to such an extent that fifty per cent or more of the secular leaders have forgotten their own duties and have occupied themselves with the church and with Masses, while the clergy have in the same measure given up their

priestly duties and have busied themselves with hunting, waging war, and such utterly secular affairs. Still God permitted this psalm and others like it to be sung by their mouths, even as he spoke to Balaam through the donkey, although the stupid prophet was unable to understand it (Num. 22:28).

This psalm, however, is directed especially against those schismatic spirits who put on a front of great holiness by condemning housekeeping, the estate of marriage, and other high and low positions on earth. For it instructs and comforts the people who occupy these positions and must occupy them; it bids them not to run away and forsake everything.

That These Words of Christ, "This is my Body," etc., Still Stand Firm Against the Fanatics (LW 37:27-28)

How can one believe that these fanatics teach rightly and well, when they are clearly found to be entertaining such devilish ideas and advising things which make for the despising, blaspheming, and disgrace of God and our eternal death and destruction, and who yet think they have acted wisely and presented a salutary Christian teaching?

But we poor sinners, who are altogether devoid of Spirit, have this to say out of the holy gospel against these holy Christians, "He who loves father and mother, wife and child, house and home, or even his own soul more than me is not worthy of me" [Matt. 10:37]. And again, "I have not come to bring peace on earth, but a sword" [Matt. 10:34]. And Paul, "What accord has Christ with Belial?" [II Cor. 6:15]. If we are to practice Christian unity with them and extend Christian love to them, we must also love and be satisfied with, or at least

tolerate, their doctrine and behavior. Let anyone do that if he wishes. Not I. For Christian unity consists in the Spirit, when we are of one faith, one mind, one heart, Ephesians 4[:3 ff.]. This, however, we will gladly do: in civil matters we are glad to be one with them, i.e. to maintain outward, temporal peace. But in spiritual matters, as long as we have breath, we intend to shun, condemn, and censure them, as idolaters, corrupters of God's Word, blasphemers, and liars; and meanwhile, to endure from them, as from enemies, their persecution and schism as far and as long as God endures them; and to pray for them, and admonish them to stop. But to acquiesce in, keep silence over, or approve their blaspheming, this we shall not and cannot do.

All these things I have exposed in order to show how the devil can disguise himself under false humility, peace, and forbearance, for the warning of all who do not humble themselves from the heart, that they should beware both of the devil and of themselves. For God allows himself to be neither deceived nor mocked. He would rather take an ass and condemn great prophets through her mouth, as he did Balaam [Num. 22:28 ff.]. Therefore, to these fanatics and spirits who offer us such a peace, we may well say as Christ said to his betrayer, Judas, in the garden, "O Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" [Luke 22:48]. Yes indeed, a Judas' peace and a traitor's kiss it is when they would be friendly to us and get us to the point of watching in silence while they ravage with fire and sword, by which they bring so many souls into the everlasting fire of hell, all the while wishing it to be regarded as a minor matter and of no consequence. God warns us against these spirits by allowing them to come

into the open and betray themselves and reveal how they traffic in lies and falsehoods. And if this stratagem does not shock or warn men, let them go; they want to be lost! The Holy Spirit offers no such stratagems through his poor sinners as the devil does here through his great saints.

Against the Heavenly Prophets in the Matter of Images and Sacraments (LW 40:210-12)

St. Paul says of the bread, "This is the body which is given for you." Brother, how can it be for us? "Broken among us" would have been better. What nimble feet this spirit has, to jump so easily over this word "for us." Brother, why? This is the reason: He has undertaken to deny that the forgiveness of sins is in the sacrament. Such an undertaking is filthy, where the word "broken for us" still stands. It cannot mean otherwise than that such breaking of bread and body takes place and is instituted that it might avail us and redeem us from sins. For Christ has placed the strength and power of his suffering in the sacrament, so that we may there lay hold on it and find it according to the word, "This is my body, which is given for you for the forgiveness of sins," as we shall hear now, right soon. Therefore, this word was to remain untouched by this spirit.

Frau Hulda's fifth attempt is directed especially toward the Luther who has taught that when a person has a conscience troubled by sin he should go to the sacrament and there obtain comfort and the forgiveness of sins. Here Peter Rültz is first of all a fine fellow and speaks boldly: "O you false prophets, you promise the kingdom of God to the people for a piece of bread. I know that you do not improve the bread by your secret breathing

and whispering, why then do you say that sins can be forgiven when you have blown upon it? Why do you not just as well take a handful of barley, etc., and eat it in God's name, so that you may be free from your sins?" ...

Tell me, first, spirit of lies, when have we ever taught that a piece of bread forgives sins? ... Since you know that we do not teach so, what kind of a spirit is it that makes you lie so scandalously? If it were because you forgot or did not know, I could regard you as human. But since you lie so maliciously, knowingly, and poisonously, no one can see in you anything else than the evil spirit. But it is the nature of these prophets to speak thus scornfully and insultingly in divine matters in order to excite the mad mob which gets the idea through such words that here is the real victory and triumph, though they hear no real sense.

Secondly, tell me when we whisper or breathe upon the bread? Ah, now, show me! And where have we ever taught that our whispering and breathing have improved the bread? Ah, now, why don't you answer? All right, I will take an oath. If Dr. Karlstadt believes there is any God in heaven or on earth, may Christ my Lord never more be merciful and gracious to me. I know that is a serious oath. My reason for it is that Dr. Karlstadt knows that we do not breathe or whisper over the bread, but do speak the divine, almighty, heavenly, and holy words which Christ himself spoke at the supper with his holy lips and commanded us to speak. I shall remain silent concerning the evil and sinful papists. I affirm this, that if an ass, as Balaam's ass [Num. 22.28], spoke these words, or if even a devil spoke them, still they are the

words of God and are to be held in all honor, as is fitting.

The Keys (LW 40:351)

Well, we pretty well know that the Romans do not consider us Germans to be human beings, but empty shells and shadows. They are so proud and overbearing that they think when a cardinal lets wind, the Germans believe a new article of faith is born. This is our own doing, and it is our own fault that we are such idiots and allow ourselves to be so duped and imposed upon. But I hope we idiots have made some impression on them, and foolish Balaam ought to listen for once to his donkey [Num. 22:28]. If they do not want to give dispensations and permission, they do not have to do so. Let the cursed devil ask them for it in my stead. Let them give him a dispensation and hang it around his neck. I will act according to my understanding of God's Word. I will not first ask God's enemies and blasphemers, the fools in Rome, whether they will permit it, but follow the old adage, "act first, ask afterwards." As far as I by God's will can help it, they shall not place their throne above God's Word, and teach him what he should command us.

Against the Roman Papacy an Institution of the Devil (LW 41:360-62)

Third, a natural donkey, which carries sacks to the mill and eats thistles, can also judge the holy Roman curia—indeed, all creatures can! For a donkey knows it is a donkey and not a cow. Again, it knows it is a male, not a female. A stone knows it is a stone; water is water, and so on through all the creatures. But the mad papal asses in Rome do not know they are asses—they do not even

know whether they are women or men. In summary, they can do nothing but devour endowments, convents, and the world's goods, rob and steal the crowns of kings, and lead vain, unnatural, perverted, devilish lives, over which all creation is frightened, trembles, shakes, and cries out about the donkey stable to him who made them subject to such corruption, Romans 8 [:21], that he should deliver them, which he will soon do.

"Yes, what does the pope care about such a verdict, since no one dares to punish or depose him?" Well then, I don't want him to care. He is not worthy of caring about it. Balaam did not care that he was punished by his donkey and afterward by the angel [Num. 22:21-35]. The Sodomites did not care either that they were punished by Lot. "How (they said) are you to be judge over us?" [Gen. 19:9]. It is enough for us that we know the pope is damned by God himself, by all angels, by all Christians, by all of human reason, by all creatures, by their own conscience, even by all devils. So, free of him, his idolatry, and his blasphemy, we with a good conscience teach and pray against him, dare to spit at him, avoid him and flee from him as from the devil himself, remove him from our hearts, and sink him into the depths of hell; and we can turn his accursed teaching around where he screams, "Whoever is not obedient to the See of Rome cannot be saved," and claim just the opposite, saying, "Whoever is obedient to the pope cannot be saved. But whoever would be saved must avoid, flee, and damn the pope, his works and nature, like the devil himself, as our holy baptism teaches and exhorts us." Let this verdict go forth—the judge that follows will not hesitate with his verdict, as St. Paul says in II Thessalonians 2 [:8], "The Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and

destroy him by his appearing and his coming."

"Yes, but you and your followers are damned heretics; your judgment is nothing against the Roman See's judgment, as St. Paula III wrote Emperor Charles that you should not be admitted to the council." First, I shall answer in Latin, "I ask and demand, in the name of all of us, from the Roman See, namely, from the one which decides whether the popes are men or women: if they are men, they should produce witnesses against us heretics; if they are women, I will quote the saying of Paul, 'The women should keep silence in the churches' [I Cor. 14:34].

A Letter of Consolation to All who Suffer Persecution (LW 43:67-68)

Lord, heavenly Father, if we must fall into sin, let us fall into any other sin, but deliver us from a hardening of the heart, and keep us in and with him whom you appointed Lord over sin and innocence. If we do not deny him or lose sight of him, all sin, death, and hell will not harm us. Yes, what is there that might harm us?

Still we must thank God with all our heart that he still permits us to see him, as though he did not yet contemplate the withdrawal of his word, so that he has given you and others a spirit not offended by his word and a love for it. This is attested by the fact that you do not believe because of men but because of the word itself. There are many who believe because of me. However, only those are true Christians who would adhere to the word even if they heard that I myself (God forbid) had denied and forsaken it. These are the ones who are not affected by whatever base, horrible, and shameful things they hear about

me or about our associates, for they believe not in Luther but in Christ himself. The word has them, and they have the word. They pay no heed to Luther, whether he be a knave or a saint. God can speak through Balaam as well as Isaiah, through Caiaphas as well as through Peter, yes, even through an ass. I subscribe to their opinion. I myself do not know Luther either, nor do I want to know him, nor do I preach anything about him, but about Christ. The devil may take him [Luther] if he is able to, but if he keeps his hands off Christ, all is well with us.

**The Last Sermon, Preached in Eisleben,
Matt. 11:25-30, February 15, 1546
(LW 51:388-90)**

Therefore this is what we say: I grant that emperor, pope, cardinals, princes, and nobles are wise and understanding, but I shall believe in Christ; he is my Lord, he is the one God bids me to listen to, from him he bids me to learn what real, divine wisdom and understanding is.

But right here the pope and those who follow him cry out: No, no, this you should not do; you should be obedient to the governing authorities and do what we tell you to do. Yes, I reply, this I should do, but first you become one with the Lord, who here says: "All things have been delivered to me by my Father" [Matt. 11:25]. Therefore, dear pope, emperor, king, prince, and lord, do not go on this way; I will gladly listen to you so far as secular government is concerned, but when you presume to be master in Christendom and claim power to determine what I should believe and do, this I will not accept, for then you are claiming to be wise and understanding at the point where you are a

fool and nothing has been revealed to you. For here is the Lord, who is the only one we ought to hear in these matters, as he himself says: "No one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" [Matt. 11:27], that is, to the childlike and simple, who consider themselves neither wise nor understanding, but rather hear and accept his Word. So, if it is his Word you hold up to me and command, I shall gladly accept it, even though it be spoken by a little child, or even the ass that spoke to Balaam [Num. 22:21-30]. Here I will make no distinction between the persons who speak, whether they be wise men or fools; for it has been decided and commanded: "All things have been delivered to me" [Matt. 11:27], I alone am the Man who should teach and rule, despite all the wise and understanding, who should allow their eyes to be blinded, and their reason too.

For our wisdom and understanding in divine things is the eye which the devil opened for us in paradise, when Adam and Eve, too, wanted to be wise in the devil's name. God himself taught them and gave them his Word, which they were to adhere to, if they wanted to be really wise. Then came the devil and made improvements; he closed the eyes with which they had previously seen God and not seen the devil. This is the plague which still continues to cling to us—that we want to be wise and understanding in the devil's name.

But to combat this we must learn what this means: "All things have been delivered to me." In other words: I must rule, teach, counsel, give orders, and command in my church. And when he said that, Christ openly confessed that he is true God; for no angel nor

any other creature can say that all things have been delivered to him. It is true that the devil once tried to seat himself on the throne and be like God; but he was soon flung out of heaven for it. Therefore Christ says, "All things have been delivered to me," that is, to me, to me you must be obedient. If you have my Word, then stick to it, and pay no attention to anybody who teaches and commands you differently. I will rule, protect, and save you well. Let the pope, emperor, the mighty, and the learned be wise; but don't you follow them, even though they were a thousand times wiser than they are. Don't you do what even an angel in heaven dare not do, take over the sovereignty and the power of being wise yourself or exercising power and rule in God's government. And yet these poor, miserable people, the pope, emperor, kings, and all sectarians, do not hesitate to arrogate this to themselves. But God has set his Son at his right hand and said in Ps. 2 [:7], "You are my son"; I have made the whole world and all nations your possession; hear him, you kings and lords, if you would be wise; do homage to him as your Lord; and know that what he says to you I am saying to you.

This we Christians should learn and acknowledge, even though the world does not want to do it, and we should be grateful to God that he has so richly blessed us and granted that we ourselves are able to hear him, just as Christ himself here gives joyful thanks to his heavenly Father. In times past we would have run to the ends of the world if we had known of a place where we could have heard God speak. But now that we hear this every day in sermons, indeed, now that all books are full of it, we do not see this happening. You hear at home in your house, father and mother and children sing and speak of it, the preacher speaks of it in the parish church—you ought to lift up your hands and rejoice that we have been given the honor of hearing God speaking to us through his Word.

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Image: [Rembrandt van Rijn, Anesse de Balaam, 1626](#)