

## Comments on Bruce Ware's Infralapsarianism

Like Robert Reymond, Bruce Ware defends a doctrine of limited election; and like Reymond, Ware pretty much assumes, without supporting argument, that universalism is false. Perhaps that is because his main target in this discussion is Arminianism, and his argument against Arminianism does include a few strands of argument against universalism as well.

In his discussion of Romans 8:29-30, for example, Ware argues that, according to this text, “God foreknew and predestined and called only some, not all.”<sup>1</sup> Why? Because “there is no point,” he claims, “in Paul saying ‘For those he foreknew’ if he has in mind all of humanity.”<sup>2</sup> But that is not true at all. You might as well argue that there is no point in saying, “For those God loves he also chastens,”<sup>3</sup> if one believes that God loves all people. The point of the latter remark would most likely be to offer a word of assurance during a time of hardship, not to sow doubts concerning the universality of God’s love, and that was precisely the point of Paul’s remark as well. His was a word of assurance that all will be well in the end (see 8:28), because God will guarantee it; in no way was he trying to frighten his readers with the thought that perhaps some of them—or, worse yet, perhaps some of their own loved ones—may never have been foreknown at all.

Ware goes on to write: “unless one holds to universalism (...a view already excluded by what Paul taught in Rom 2:5-11), then one must rightly conclude that only some are foreknown....”<sup>4</sup> But surely Ware could have anticipated the obvious counterclaim of similar form: “Unless one holds to Calvinism (a view already excluded by what Paul taught in Romans 5:12-21), then one must rightly conclude that all, not merely some, are foreknown.” At least Romans

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<sup>1</sup> Manuscript, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> See Hebrew 12:6 for a similar remark.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

5:12-21 contains the explicit statement that Jesus Christ brings “justification and life to all” humans. Romans 2:5-11, by way of contrast, carries no implication that those “storing up” wrath for themselves will suffer unending punishment and hence will *never* be reconciled to God. So how, I wonder, would Ware defend his own claim in light of the obvious counterclaim?

### **Some Fallacious Inferences**

Elsewhere Ware cites Jesus’ prayer in John 17 as evidence that election is *limited in scope* as well as unconditional in nature. According to 17:2, Jesus has “authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom” the Father has “given him”; and Ware interprets this as follows: “Here is authority over all in order to give eternal life to some.”<sup>5</sup> But that is a simple non sequitur. From

(1) Jesus imparts eternal life to all whom the Father gives him,  
it simply does not follow that

(2) Jesus imparts eternal life to some people only, not all.

A possible source of confusion here is that the expression, “those whom the Father has given the Son,” is unspecific with respect to time and is therefore ambiguous. According to Ware, “those who believe in Me’ of John 17:20 are *the same ones as* ‘those You have given Me’ of John 17:24” (my emphasis);<sup>6</sup> and if that is true, as I believe it is, then, for any specific time  $t$ , those who have *not yet* believed in Jesus at  $t$  will *not yet* have been given to Jesus at  $t$  either. Indeed, the concept of the Father giving someone to Jesus *just is* the concept of his bringing someone to a point of belief and trust in Jesus. So yes, at any time  $t$  prior to “the time of universal restoration” (Acts 3:21), the class of those who have been given to Jesus at  $t$  will be more restricted than the class of those over whom Jesus has authority at  $t$ . At the time that Jesus prayed for his disci-

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<sup>5</sup> Manuscript, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup> Manuscript, p.11.

ples, for example, Saul of Tarsus had *not yet* been given to Jesus and was therefore no different, in that one respect, from the unbelieving Jews of which John 6:36 speaks. But it simply does not follow that the *all* whom the Father has given to Jesus—a fluctuating and ever-expanding number—will never be coextensive with the *all* over whom Jesus has authority, as Colossians 1:20 clearly implies that it will be. Or, as Jesus himself put it elsewhere, “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw [or drag] all people to myself” (Jn. 12:32).

Ware falls prey to another fallacious inference when he argues that “The *particular will of God* surely and certainly to save some (i.e., the elect) [and not to save others] stands alongside the *universal will of God* that all be saved.”<sup>7</sup> Just how should we understand this claim? In a perfectly familiar sense of “want” or “desire,” a man may *desire* to commit adultery and nonetheless *choose* to do the right thing; similarly, Ware in effect contends, God may *desire* to save all sinners, have the power to do so, and nonetheless *choose* to damn some of them. Ware thus holds that, even as a man tempted to commit adultery might experience a *conflict of desire* in this matter, so God experiences a *conflict of desire or will* in the matter of saving the non-elect. In support of such an idea, Ware asks us to consider two texts: 1 Timothy 2:4, which states that God wills or desires the salvation of all, and 2 Timothy 2:25, which (as Ware interprets it) implies that only those to whom God grants repentance will be saved. He then argues as follows: “God wills...that all be saved, and God wills that only those to whom he grants repentance be saved. God’s will, then, is both universal and particular, desiring in the first case that all be saved, and in the second case that only some be saved.”<sup>8</sup> But once again, Ware has simply embraced an invalid argument. Suppose we grant that, even as 1 Timothy 2:4 endorses

(3) God wills that all sinful humans be saved,

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<sup>7</sup> Manuscript, pp. 45-46.

<sup>8</sup> Manuscript, p. 46.

so 2 Timothy 2:25 endorses

(4) “God wills that only those to whom he grants repentance be saved.”

From (4) it simply does not follow that God wills the salvation of some only, not all. What does follow, as a deductive consequence from conjoining (3) with (4), is:

(5) God wills that he himself should grant repentance to all sinful humans.

Accordingly, the two texts to which Ware calls our attention not only provide no reason to postulate a conflict of will within God; given Ware’s own understanding of unconditional election, they merely provide an additional reason to become a universalist.

By itself, however, (5) in no way *excludes* the possibility that God experiences a conflict of will in the matter of salvation. Perhaps *in some (unspecified) sense* God wants all to be saved and also has an overriding desire to damn some; perhaps he wants to grant repentance to all and also has an overriding desire to deny it to some. Perhaps, in a word, he is a terribly conflicted soul. But fortunately, a text such as 2 Peter 3:9 clearly excludes the possibility that God has an overriding desire, will, or purpose to damn some people. For this text states both sides of the proverbial coin: It not only states that God *wills* or *purposes* that all should come to repentance (see (5) above); it also states that God is *unwilling* that any should perish. Now if a man is unwilling to commit adultery on a particular occasion, then one of two conditions obtains: Either the man has no desire at all to commit adultery on that occasion, or, if he does have such a desire, it is not an overriding desire and therefore does not explain the choice that he makes. And similarly for Ware’s example of Winston Churchill: Had Churchill been *unwilling* to sacrifice the people of Coventry,<sup>9</sup> he would have taken steps to warn them of the impending bombing attack. So even if in an act of desperation we interpret God’s desire to save all, as expressed in 1 Timothy 2:4, to be compatible with an overriding desire to guarantee the damnation of some, 2

Peter 3:9 rules out such a possibility. For it is logically impossible that God should causally determine the very thing that he is *unwilling* to bring about.

### **Misunderstanding the Nature of Love**

Ware's contention that God suffers from a conflict of will in the case of the non-elect also carries important implications for Ware's understanding of the divine nature. For not only is God's justice in conflict with his mercy; given Ware's view, God also experiences an inner conflict between one kind of love, which expresses itself in grace and mercy, and another so-called "love," which does not express itself in grace and mercy, but instead permits an eternity of torment to befall its objects. Ware thus distinguishes between "God's universal love for all (e.g., as seen in John 3:16)," on the one hand, and his "particular, selective, and discriminate love for his own people," on the other.<sup>10</sup> The latter, which is supposedly the higher kind of love, is exclusive, not inclusive; indeed, it excludes a good portion of the human race. And in an effort to illustrate the exclusiveness of God's redemptive love, Ware cites Ephesians 5:25-27, where Paul commanded husbands to love their wives even as Christ loves the church. Ware then argues as follows:

Just imagine the response a husband would receive from his wife were he to say to her, "Honey, I love you, but I want you to know that the love I have for you is the very same love in every respect that I have for all the women I meet, indeed, for all the women of the world!" If the wife responded by saying, "Well then, you don't really love *me*!" she would be right." If a husband's love for his wife is not particular, selective, and discriminate, then it is not really husbandly love<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See manuscript, pp. 47-48.

<sup>10</sup> Manuscript, p. 41.

<sup>11</sup> Manuscript, p. 43.

But this entire line of argument seems to me misguided, to say the least. First, a married man may very properly love many women—his mother, his sisters, his daughters, and others who are not blood relatives—every bit as much as he loves his own wife. Did not Jesus himself command that we love our neighbor, who just might be a woman, even as we love ourselves? And is that not exactly the same love that in Ephesians 5:33 Paul instructed husbands to have for their wives? Second, not only does a man’s love for other women not detract from his love for his own wife; the latter actually *requires* that he love other women—his wife’s mother, for example—even more, not less. For a man could hardly love his wife properly and, at the same time, refuse to love and respect her own loved ones, and neither could God love Isaac properly without also loving Isaac’s beloved Esau every bit as much as he loves Isaac himself (see “the Paradox of Exclusiveness” in my original essay). Third, as human beings with limited time and energy, we are all no doubt incapable, as a practical matter, of cultivating the same degree of emotional intimacy with everyone we meet, not to mention those we never meet. For time and energy devoted to one relationship is time and energy taken away from another. But God faces none of the *practical* difficulties that prevent us from including too many in our circle of intimacy. Fourth, exclusiveness in marriage and sexual relationships—which, if we take Jesus’ remarks in Luke 20:34-36 seriously, may be a concession to the human condition—has nothing to do with exclusiveness in love. For wherein lies the sin of adultery? Does it lie *only* in the fact that the man is acting in an unloving way towards his own wife? Not at all. It also lies in the fact that he is acting in an unloving way towards another woman whom he is obligated to love every bit as much as he is obligated to love his own wife. **In fact, the greater the understanding and emotional intimacy between a man and his wife, the more likely it is that their love for each other will overflow into their other relationships, thereby widening their circle of emotional inti-**

macy, not narrowing it, and thereby making sexual immorality less likely rather than more likely. And finally, Paul instructed husbands to love their wives even as Christ loves the church precisely to *elevate* their love above the grasping possessiveness, the desire to control another, and the petty jealousies that so often accompany husbandly love. The point is that husbandly love, like parental love, brotherly love, sisterly love, etc., should illustrate our *oneness* in Christ without any implication of excluding someone else from that *spiritual* oneness.

Now in what sense is God's so-called love for the non-elect, as Ware understands it, even an intelligible form of love? Ware neither provides a hint of its nature nor explains why it should be called *love* rather than *hatred*. Suppose that someone should argue as follows: Adolph Hitler in fact did have a generalized love for all people, including Jews, and he even willed or desired the preservation of them all. But he also had a "particular, selective, and discriminate love" for Aryans, and the greater good of perfecting a super-race required that he (regretfully) commit genocide against the Jews. Is this "reasoning" any better than the following? God does have a generalized love for all people, including the non-elect, and he sincerely wills or desires that they all be saved. But the greater good of promoting his own glory requires that he causally determine, first, that the non-elect become sinners, second, that they never repent of their sin, and third, that they endure an eternity of excruciating and unbearable torment for their sin. In both cases, the concept of *love* is simply emptied of any intelligible meaning, and this is especially true in the latter case because God is supposedly omnipotent and omniscient. For surely, not just anything can qualify as an expression of love. If Hitler formulated and executed a plan to exterminate the Jews, the claim that he in some sense loved them rings hollow, to say the least. But even here, perhaps, we can imagine a kind of perverted love in a mind sufficiently deranged and irrational; perhaps, for all we know, Hitler actually saw himself as willing the best for the Jews.

In the case of God, however, we are dealing with a perfectly rational mind. So if God formulates and executes a plan to predestine millions of people to a calamitous end, one involving an eternity of torment, then the claim that God loves these people in any sense is, I think it fair to say, simply nonsense, as the more consistent Calvinists (the supralapsarians) seem to acknowledge. For instead of claiming that God loves the non-elect, Hermann Hoeksema described God's attitude towards them as "the sovereign hatred of his good pleasure."<sup>12</sup> And in a similar vein, Jonathan Edwards described God's attitude towards those in hell this way: "In hell God manifests his being and perfections only in hatred and wrath, and hatred without love."<sup>13</sup> That, at least, has the virtue of being an honest use of language.

In any event, the following principle surely is necessarily true:

(P<sub>1</sub>) If (a) it is within God's power to save some sinner S, (b) it is within God's power to do so without causing irreparable harm to befall some other loved one, and (c) instead of saving S God *causally determines* that S will suffer an eternity of torment in hell, then God has no love of any intelligible kind for S.

And given (P<sub>1</sub>), we can also see why Ware's example of Winston Churchill has no relevant application to God. For one thing, Churchill did not *directly* cause the death of anyone in Coventry; at most he *permitted* the death of some, on account of conditions over which he had no control, in order to minimize the total loss of life among the English. Had he actually gone out and shot some people in Coventry, that would have been more analogous to Ware's understanding of God, but still importantly different, because Churchill had no sovereignty in the matter of life and death. Lacking the power to save all of the English, he faced a kind of "Sophie's choice"

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<sup>12</sup> For the quotation from *Het Evangelie*, see G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Company, 1960) p.224.

<sup>13</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and its Fruits*, reprinted in Paul Ramsey (ed.), *Works of Jonathan Edwards, Vol. 8: Ethical Writings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 390.

analogous to what I would face if I were in a boating accident with my two children and had the power to save either one of them but not both. Here it would be my *inability* to save both children that makes leaving one behind compatible with genuine love and a sincere desire to save both. But suppose now that I actually planned the boating accident in order to put both my children in a helpless position; suppose further that I had the power to save both and to do so without harming someone else; and suppose, finally, that, instead of saving both, I save my son and allow my daughter to drown. In that case, it matters not what my higher (or more basic) purpose might be, whether it be an insurance payoff or an effort to promote my own glory: If the more basic purpose requires that I bring about my daughter's demise, then it clearly excludes any genuine love for her and excludes any reasonably sincere desire for her to continue living. Similarly, if God planned and causally determined that all the descendants of Adam should be born in a helpless condition; and if God has the power to save the entire human race, but instead of exercising that power causally determines that some will be lost forever and suffer eternal torment in hell, then God has no love for the non-elect and no reasonably sincere desire that they be saved either.

### **A Confusion about Moral Responsibility**

We thus approach the most basic weakness in Ware's understanding of Reformed theology. According to Ware, the non-elect are morally responsible for rejecting the gospel even though it was causally determined long before they were born that they would do so. "So long as those who reject the gospel," he writes, "act out of their own natures and inclinations, choosing and doing what they most want, . . . they are fully responsible for their actions."<sup>14</sup> But according to this quotation, doing what one most wants is a *sufficient condition* of being morally responsible for one's actions, and not even a sophisticated compatibilist (someone who believes that a thoroughgoing determinism is compatible with moral responsibility) would make that claim. A lion

that devours a man and a paranoid schizophrenic who goes off his medication and kills his loving mother may both be doing what they most want at the time, but it hardly follows that they are morally responsible for their actions.

In the end, moreover, Ware's version of compatibilism undermines entirely the New Testament doctrine of salvation by grace and the traditional Christian asymmetry between *merited* blame and *unmerited* favor. For both the damned and the sanctified simply do what they most want to do; in that respect, they both meet Ware's stated sufficient condition of being morally responsible for their actions. And according to Ware, "those who reject Christ deserve the condemnation they receive, for they did what they most wanted in that choice to say 'no' to God's gracious offer of salvation."<sup>15</sup> But if that is true, then, by parity of reasoning, so also is the following: "Those who accept Christ *deserve* the reward they receive, for they did what they most wanted in that choice to say 'yes' to God's gracious offer of salvation." Similarly, the sanctified should receive (and even take) moral credit for their righteous actions. For if the damned deserve moral condemnation for actions caused by a sinful nature over which they have no control, then the sanctified likewise deserve moral credit for actions caused by their regenerated hearts and renewed minds. In the very next sentence, however, Ware writes: "And those who receive Christ cannot boast at all in their receiving the eternal life that comes by faith..., for apart from God's effectual and gracious work in their lives, to open their hearts...and their eyes..., they, too, would never have come."<sup>16</sup> But you simply cannot have it both ways. You cannot sensibly say *both* that all credit for salvation goes to God because he graciously regenerates the hearts of the elect, causing them to repent, *and* that none of the blame for damnation goes to God even

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<sup>14</sup> Manuscript, p. 53

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*.

though he brings the non-elect into their earthly existence with a sinful nature over which they have no control, blinds them to the truth, and causes them to be hard of heart.

Accordingly, by acknowledging that Christians have no grounds for boasting, Ware inadvertently makes two concessions that are fatal to his own view: First, doing what one most wants could not possibly be a sufficient condition of moral responsibility because, second, how people come to be the persons they are and the *external factors* determining what they most want are indeed relevant to the issue of moral credit and moral blame. Few Christians would likely find it surprising that Paul consistently praised God, not the people themselves, for the faithfulness of his Christian co-workers. But if God's work of regenerating the heart and sanctifying the saints transfers the moral credit for their good works away from the saints themselves, then God's causally determining the sins and the damnation of the non-elect—an unbiblical idea if ever there was one<sup>17</sup>—would likewise transfer the moral blame for their sinful actions away from the damned. Given Ware's deterministic views, in other words, only God can be blamed for someone's rejecting Christ, even as only God can be "credited" for someone's accepting Christ.

In an effort to preserve a reasonable asymmetry between deserved punishment and unmerited favor, therefore, the Arminians rightly insist upon an incompatibilist (or libertarian) analysis of free will as the power of contrary choice. Given that we have such free will, we can be blamed, say the Arminians, for our own sins, which God himself does not causally determine, but we cannot credit ourselves for God's gracious work in our hearts or for the good works that such a gracious work does causally determine. But right here Ware falls into an even deeper confusion. Arguing that "both reason and Scripture demonstrate that the so-called power of contrary choice is an illusion and does not really exist," he embraces the following invalid argument: "It is not necessary for them [the non-elect] to have had the moral ability to accept the gospel

(when they reject it) for God to hold them accountable, since this very notion (of the so-called power of contrary choice) is both contrary to reason and Scripture.”<sup>18</sup> There are really two fallacious inferences here. The first is Ware’s implicit inference that, if some non-elect person S rejects the gospel at a time  $t$ , God could not have granted S the power to accept the gospel at  $t$  without also granting S the power of contrary choice at  $t$ ; the second is his explicit inference that, if no power of contrary choice exists, then God can justifiably hold people morally accountable for not doing something that they never had the power to do in the first place. Remarkably, Ware not only rests his argument from reason on such fallacious inferences as these; he ignores altogether any such commonsense principle as the following:

(P<sub>2</sub>) A person S suffering from a condition of paranoid schizophrenia that causes irrational desires, beliefs, and actions is morally accountable for this condition only if either (a) there was a time at which S had the power to prevent it or (b) there is a time at which S acquires the power to overcome it and to prevent the relevant irrational actions.

It is important to stress that (P<sub>2</sub>) includes no assumption concerning the existence of a power of contrary choice, and even many compatibilists—Susan Wolf, for example—would no doubt accept it. For according to Wolf, moral responsibility requires not the power of contrary choice, but only “the ability to act in accordance with the True and the Good.”<sup>19</sup> Virtually all compatibilists, moreover, reject the libertarian idea of *intrinsic desert*: the idea that certain punishments—or certain rewards, as the case may be—are intrinsically fitting responses to certain actions. So both compatibilists and libertarians generally agree that no one could possibly *deserve* eternal retribution, as an intrinsically fitting response, for sins that God himself has caus-

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<sup>17</sup> See my comments on Jack Cottrell’s Arminianism.

<sup>18</sup> Manuscript, p. 53.

ally determined. And if we suppose, as Ware does, that accepting Christ is the only way to overcome a sinful condition, then not even the typical compatibilist would reject the following principle:

(P<sub>3</sub>) A person S with a sinful nature that causes sinful actions deserves eternal retribution as a just penalty for sin only if either (a) there was a time at which S had the power to prevent S's sinful nature or (b) there is a time at which S acquires the power to accept Christ.

Even among compatibilists, then, only Calvinists seem prepared to reject a principle such as (P<sub>3</sub>). But why do they reject it? An argument against the power of contrary choice<sup>20</sup> is no substitute for an argument against (P<sub>3</sub>), and Ware nowhere gives a single good reason, either philosophical or biblical, for rejecting (P<sub>3</sub>).

I conclude, therefore, that Ware's defense of Calvinism is unsuccessful. His exegetical arguments for limited election rest upon several fallacious inferences and take no account of Paul's explicit statement in Romans 11:32 that God is merciful to all; his claim that, on his view, God has a generalized love for the non-elect is, in the end, unintelligible; and his argument against the power of contrary choice provides no good reason to believe that the non-elect somehow *deserve* eternal retribution at the hands of an arbitrary and unloving God.

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<sup>19</sup> Susan Wolf, *Freedom Within Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> For why Ware's arguments against the power of contrary choice seem to me unsuccessful, see my defense of Jack Cottrell's understanding of significant moral freedom in my comments on his chapter.