

**HIGHER GROUND:
CHOSEN FOR A REASON
Ephesians 1:3-4**

A few years ago, Hurricane Isaac swept ashore in South Louisiana. The pounding rain and surging tide caused flooding in Plaquemines Parish. News reports described the scene. Livestock climbed to the highest ground they could find. In some instances, they were seen standing on the porches of homes or wandering in the abandoned homes of those who had fled the flooding. Individuals climbed into their attics armed with food, water, and axes to cut through their roofs.

Paul challenged the Ephesian believers to appreciate their situation. The swirling, nasty floodwaters of this world threaten to engulf everything in their path. Our only salvation is to find higher ground. Their and our higher ground is not a place. It is not a philosophy. It is not a platitude. Our higher ground is in a relationship with Jesus Christ.

For the next few Sundays, we will explore this higher ground.

I. THE IRREFUTABLE BASIS OF SALVATION

A. Paul began this profuse prayer of praise by clarifying the basis of all our salvation. *³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, ⁴ just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.*

1. The author of our salvation is God.
2. He purposefully chose us for salvation.
3. Our chosen-ness is based on the work of Christ.

The Father's blessings, grace, and salvation flow only through Christ. *⁶ Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me. John 14:6 (NASB95)*

4. Our chosen-ness was decided before the foundation of the world.
- B. Paul made clear that our salvation rests completely on the finished work of God and not on anything in ourselves.
1. We make many efforts at accomplishing our salvation.
 - a. Works
 - b. Character
 - c. Lineage
 - d. Universalism
 2. All of our salvation is accomplished in Jesus Christ.

II. THE IRRECONCILABLE TENSION BETWEEN ELECTION AND FREE WILL

- A. The idea of being chosen by God and being chosen before the foundation of the world is a perplexing reality for many. ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,* ⁴ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world.* Jesus made it clear that no one could be saved apart from the singular work of God. ¹⁶ *“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. John 15:16 (NASB95)* ¹³ *But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.* ² *Thessalonians 2:13 (NASB95)* Paul wrote to the Christian community to remind them that they had been chosen by God. They could not add to or take away from the saving work God accomplished in Jesus Christ. **An infinite will which is validated or invalidated, as the case may be, at the beck of finite**

humanity dwindles to the dimensions of an obsequious lay-figure, shorn of awe and dominion, a debilitated travesty of Godhead that confutes and discredits itself. Let us worship an untrammelled Potentate, God over all.¹

- B. At the same time, Paul pointed out the dynamic at work in us that involves our free will. We are not pre-programmed robots who are without choice. Our salvation or lack of salvation is not a pre-programmed reality that will happen regardless of our response. ⁸ *For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;* ⁹ *not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.* Ephesians 2:8–9 (NASB95) ¹¹ *For the Scripture says, “Whoever believes in Him will not be disappointed.”* ¹² *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him;* ¹³ *for “Whoever will call on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* Romans 10:11–13 (NASB95) ¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.* John 3:16 (NASB95)
- C. The two biblical truths of election and free will do not cancel out each other. They are held in tension by God’s design.

III. THE INESCAPABLE PURPOSE OF HIS CHOICE

- A. Paul had to have been aware of the paradox he presented. Election and free will seem to be contradictory. Yet, they are presented to us as parts of the whole of our salvation. Paul did not seem to get bogged down in this part of the presentation. He continued on to remind the congregation about the purpose of their being

¹ E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1957), 26.

chosen. ³ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,* ⁴ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him.*

1. The believers at Ephesus had been chosen for holiness.
 2. God intended for the Ephesians believers to stand blameless before him. Jesus made clear this expectation in Matthew 5:48. ⁴⁸ *“Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* **Matthew 5:48 (NASB95)**
- B. Holiness has two distinct elements. It means that something/someone has been set aside for a particular purpose. It means that the object chosen is kept apart for its intended purpose. Holiness also implies a moral purity.
- C. God’s purpose and the world’s purpose are in direct opposition to each other. Consequently, we cannot embrace both the world and God. We must love one and hate the other. We are chosen by God to be a witness to a lost, spiritually-decaying world. Our chosenness is not a privilege, but a responsibility. It is not a title, but a mission.