

RUF Bible Study – Ephesians  
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Ephesians 1:1-14<sup>2</sup>

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus: 2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. 7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, 8 which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight 9 making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ 10 as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. 11 In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, 12 so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. 13 In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.*

I have to say something about introductory matters before we begin with the text itself. It's important to do that, especially on a college campus and one that has a Religious Studies Department that teaches Bible classes. In those classes you will encounter the popular critical view that Ephesians is a late-written book by someone pretending to be Paul, but certainly not Paul. Evidence marshaled against Paul includes the unusualness of the words he chooses in contrast to his other works, the observation that the writer doesn't make reference to anyone in particular, which would be unusual for Paul, and the lack of a referent to Ephesus, one of the key cities in which Paul plated churches.

However, we must posit that all of these charges can be answered with Paul remaining as the author, as he was attested as being from the first, second and third centuries up until the nineteenth. He would have been under house arrest in Rome, and probably wrote Ephesians and Colossians at around the same time. These would have most likely been dictated to someone who wrote them down. It isn't hard to think that someone writing about a different theme and subject would use different words to express these new thoughts. So a variance in vocabulary shouldn't be an issue at all.

Most early manuscripts do not have the words "in Ephesus" in the opening verse. Our best guess would be that this was written as a circular letter, meant to be passed from church to church in Asia Minor. This would account for the lack of specificity in the advice and the lack of names and places in the salutation and ending. Since Paul had been well acquainted with Ephesus, copies may have been made there to be sent out, and many might have thought that these had originated from a writing to Ephesus itself and the words "in Ephesus" may have slipped in that way.

FF Bruce sums up the argument that we should assume that Paul is the author of Ephesians based on the evidence we have and evidence the contrary position doesn't have like this: "The man who could write Ephesians must have been the apostle's equal, if not his superior, in mental stature and spiritual insight... Of such a second Paul early Christian history has no knowledge."<sup>3</sup>

If you would like to study this more, I'd recommend Peter O'Brien's commentary, *The Letter to the Ephesians*<sup>4</sup> where he devotes 82 pages to this and other discussions on this matter.

This book helps us in many ways. At the end you'll see that the last three chapters focus on how we are to live as Christians. There are thoughts in there about marriage, families, work, war, self-esteem, spiritual gifts, the church, dealing with sin, anger, speech, sex, shame and much more. It's tempting to jump right to those topics and start to unpack them. But Paul keeps us from that by giving us the first three chapters first.

These first three chapters are from God's point of view. The university does a good job in speaking against ethnocentrism. Preaching against ethnocentrism helps you to see things from a different perspective, opens you up to other ways of looking at things. But the university does a lousy job in speaking against anthropocentrism. We need to see things from another point of view altogether. Not just different from how Oklahomans, or Midwesterners/Southwesterners or Americans, but different from Homo Sapiens.

As perhaps valuable as it may be to consider things from a canine or feline or cephalopod viewpoint, it may be more helpful to look at things from God's point of view. And he gives it to us in this passage, starting with chapter one. Here we read of the Trinity, as God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all spoken of in these verses. Here we read about predestination, and you may be surprised to find out that it's not a word that Calvinists made up, but a word that can be found in the Bible. Here we see about what is in God's mind, and try to expand our own to conform to his.

When I went to Berlin, Germany last summer, Doug Seewald, Brain Hewes and I paid to go up the television tower in Alexandersplatz. Hundreds of feet in the air, we looked out on the city, and tried to figure out where things we had visited and were going to visit were. We decided to get a reservation and ate in the restaurant that spun around, giving you further panoramic

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<sup>2</sup> Sources: commentaries by Tom Wright, Peter O'Brien, John Stott, J.M. Boice; sermons by Rev. Tim Keller and Rev. Rob Rayburn

<sup>3</sup> Quote found in Stott, 21

<sup>4</sup> (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999)

views of the city. As I ate my white asparagus (apparently a luxury?) and my German meats, and drank my Berliner Pils, I was able to keep watching the view of the city I had come to visit and would later explore in great detail.

Let's see what we can learn when we take the elevator up into the tv tower and look down at the city.

### ***Beliefs lead to actions***

The first point is to understand why Paul is doing this. We mentioned that Paul begins with theology before going into practice. That may be frustrating, but I think it's perfectly understandable. You probably disagree.

Many will say that there is no creed but deed, that it doesn't matter what someone believes as long as they live right. That's a nice thing to say, and very popular these days, but is inherently contradictory, for that statement in and of itself is a belief. To separate belief from action is impossible if we are to create any sort of society. Some will put it this way, The most important thing is to make yourself happy as long as you don't hurt anyone else in the process. Sounds pretty good, doesn't it? But what is happiness after all? And what exactly is wrong to do? And how would I know if it were wrong to do something that made me happy? How does that work out and get decided along the way? Can we make any outside judgments at all? If a forty year old man and a ten year old girl fell in love, and both were happy, would that be wrong? If I am a landlord and want to charge you more and fix your apartment less and you want to pay less and get more fixed, how would we resolve that conflict?

No creed but deed is an impossibility. Instead of fooling ourselves, we need to embrace the biblical way of thinking of things and realize that what we believe affects, and even controls what we do. Everything that we do comes from some place of belief, however hidden from our eyes. We believe babies matter. Or they're fetuses. We believe human life is valuable or not. We believe that money makes the man. Or accessories the woman. Or pecs or calves or abs or hair or biceps or breasts. Or sex makes me happy. Or a good job cannot be found without a degree. Or a Master's. Or a 4.0. Or *this* major. Or the right husband or wife. These are beliefs that affect our actions.

Let's just be honest about this and admit it. Paul's going to drive us to examine our beliefs. To lose our anthropomorphic ones in light of God's theocentric ones. Are we ready for this.

### ***Predestination is a Bible Concept***

Paul writes right off the bat, *2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.*

Paul is thinking about grace and peace, and then he gets going with verse three with a sentence that in the Greek runs from verse 3 to verse 14. He rambles on and on, because he's so excited about what God has done and how that affects the believer. He can't help himself when he gets going.

He talks about how "we" have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places. This means that there is no spiritual blessing for the Christian that is not actualized for him or her. It's all there. Why? Because the Christian has been chosen before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him.

And then, there it is. You may have missed it when Paul said that we were chosen, but you cannot escape it here – predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ.

The Christian has been predestined. We have to talk about predestination. Now I want you to know that I am a certainly uneasy to talk about this in some respect. I know that many of you may be offended. But I cannot sidestep the issue for two reasons. The first reason is because it's *in the Bible*. I'm committed to teaching the Bible straight through book by book, and this word is here. I didn't put it there. I'm not doing a topical study on predestination or hard teachings of the Bible or things that might make you mad. I'm teaching through the book of Ephesians.

When RC Sproul<sup>5</sup> was studying in seminary, he would look at something every day that he had written as a commitment to himself and his study: **YOU ARE REQUIRED TO BELIEVE, TO PREACH AND TO TEACH WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS IS TRUE, NOT WHAT YOU WANT THE BIBLE TO SAY IS TRUE.**<sup>6</sup> I like this, and agree with it. I must conform my teaching to what it is the Bible says. "Divine sovereignty is not an issue peculiar to Calvinism, or even to Christianity. Without sovereignty, God cannot be God. If we reject divine sovereignty, we must embrace atheism. This is the problem we all face."<sup>7</sup>

The other reason I'm telling you this is because I think it has tremendous value to the believer who understands and embraces it. So it has a doctrinal aspect that affects your beliefs and that works its way out into your life and behavior.

Before we talk about how it does that, let me deal with your objections. We can talk about this more, and I'd point you to read RC Sproul's *Chosen by God* or Michael Horton's *Putting Amazing Back Into Grace* for some easy to read treatments of these themes. Those books were both influential to me when I was wondering about these things.

Now let me deal briefly with your objections. Obviously, I cannot spend a great deal of time on all of these, so let me make a response in hopes that we can talk about them more.

You have to understand that every Christian has a doctrine of predestination. You have to – it's in the Bible. The most common interpretation that counteracts the Reformed position is that of a divine foreknowledge so let's start there. Non-Reformed

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<sup>5</sup> A speaker, author and professor in our denomination

<sup>6</sup> Sproul, 12

<sup>7</sup> Sproul., 27

views of predestination assume that every fallen person is left with the capacity to choose Christ. Man is not viewed as being so fallen that it requires direct intervention of God to the degree that Calvinism asserts. The non-Reformed views all leave it in man's power to cast the deciding ballot for man's ultimate destiny. In these views the best option is the second. God provides opportunities for all to be saved. But certainly the opportunities are not equal, since vast multitudes of people die without ever hearing the gospel.<sup>8</sup> Some will say that God looks down the corridor of time, sees who will choose him and then chooses them on the basis of that choice. So he predestines them according to his foreknowledge of their choice.

It's difficult to muster a cogent argument against something that just doesn't make sense. You have to think about this seemingly profound argument to realize that God would still be choosing to make a person a Christian based on the choice of that person. So the person is what makes him or her a Christian, and why does predestination need to be involved or even talked about?

The real issue is that the word "foreknow." That word means "know beforehand." What does the word "know" mean in the Bible? It is almost exclusively talking about an intimate relationship, a personal knowledge. Not informational knowing. Remember this is one of the Bible's euphemisms for sex! When Jesus says, "Be gone from me, I never knew you," he isn't saying that he didn't know about them, that they aren't on the list of humans, or that the information he has about them is incorrect. He's saying that he isn't in a personal relationship with them.

An important text to look at here is Romans 8:29-30: *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.* Theologians have called this the Golden Chain because of its connecting important concepts together in a progression.

RC Sproul writes, "The conclusion that God's predestination is determined by God's foreknowledge is not taught by this passage (Romans 8:29-30). Paul does not come out and say that God chooses people on the basis of his prior knowledge of their choices. That idea is neither stated nor implied by the text. All the text declares is that God predestines those whom he foreknows. No one in this debate disputes that God has foreknowledge. Even God could not choose people he didn't know anything about. Before he could choose Jacob he had to have some idea in his mind of Jacob. But the text does not teach that God chose Jacob on the basis of Jacob's choice...."

The Golden Chain teaches more than the foreknowledge view wants it to teach. It teaches that God predestines an inward call. All whom God predestines to be called inwardly will be justified. God is here doing something in the hearts of the elect to insure their positive response.

The Reformed view of predestination understands the Golden Chain as follows: From all eternity God foreknew his elect. He had an idea of their identities in his mind before he ever created them. He not only foreknew them in the sense of having a prior idea of their personal identity, but he also foreknew them in the sense of foreloving them. We must remember that when the Bible speaks of 'knowing' it often distinguishes between a simple mental awareness of a person and a deep intimate love of the person."<sup>9</sup>

The first and most frequent objection is that this Reformed doctrine of foreknowledge and predestination violates free will. That seems to settle it. One thing to notice is that you will not find the words "free will" in the Bible. The concept may be in there (the word "trinity" isn't in the Bible either but we still understand and believe it), but it very well may not.

I believe in free will and think that the Bible and the Reformed position teach free will. This means that you are able to choose whatever you wish to. Not a problem with that at all. The problem isn't with the ability, but with the desire. You will only be able to choose what you most desire, and it's your desires that are screwed up according to your sin nature.

Think of it this way: If you were to put a huge vat of Captain Crunch in front of a tiger on the one side and a carcass of deer meat on the other, which would it choose? 1000 times out of 1000 it would choose the meat, right? Are you saying it's not able to eat cereal? Zoologists and tiger specialists will tell you that it certainly is able. But a tiger is carnivorous and, given the choice, it will choose meat.<sup>10</sup>

The Bible says that no one seeks God. Read Romans 3. That no one can choose God because no one desires God. Your ability is fine. It's your chooser that's messed up and preserving free will doesn't fix that problem. Besides, who cares if your free will is preserved if you are in hell? Wouldn't you rather have that violated for a second to have peace with God for eternity? When did free will become so special?<sup>11</sup>

Another objection is that this doctrine of God choosing some over others isn't fair. If by "it's not fair," you mean that it's not equal then we would have to agree. It's not equal. Equal would be that everyone goes to hell or everyone gets redeemed. That's fair. Getting what we deserve is not the issue, for the Bible says that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God and the wages of sin is death.

Some people getting saved from the pains of hell is merciful, not unjust. Here's another illustration: You have five friends who plan on robbing Quicker Liquor. You don't know why they tell you, but they want you in on it. You try to talk them out of it, but they refuse to listen. On the way out the door of the night of the robbery, you sneak up, knock out two of them with a baseball bat and drag them back into the house. The other three go through with the robbery, end up killing the Quicker Liquor clerk and now are in prison on death row. The two who didn't go because you whacked them finally wake up, of course don't go, and naturally aren't convicted of the crime. You've saved their lives.

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<sup>8</sup> Sproul, 34

<sup>9</sup> Sproul, 135, 137

<sup>10</sup> I've heard this illustration many times, but the latest was from Tim Keller.

<sup>11</sup> "God is free. I am free. God is more free than I am. If my freedom runs up against God's freedom, I lose. His freedom restricts mine; my freedom does not restrict his." Sproul, 43

When you go to visit the ones in prison, they blame you. You could have saved them all, but only picked two. It's your fault they're in here. Is that true? No, that's crazy. The two you saved have only you to thank, and the three on death row have only themselves to blame.<sup>12</sup>

God doesn't have to save any. The wonder is that he saves any at all, not that he doesn't save all.

Ah, you might say, this doctrine is wrong and bad because it takes away all my incentive to share the gospel. If it's all fixed, then what's the point of evangelism? Friends, if that is your reason, then you are missing the point of life with God.

Suppose I take my family to a cabin in Colorado for Spring Break. Say my son Cal is now a teenager, and we need to chop some wood to make a fire so we won't freeze in this cabin. I tell him I want him to come with me so we can do this together. I show him how to do it, do it for awhile and then ask him to take over because I need to go inside for a few minutes to check on something.

I come back. No wood has been chopped. Cal is sitting there. "Son," I say. "Why are you chopping wood like I asked?" "Well, dad, I know that you love our family and wouldn't ever let us freeze in the woods like this. So, since I know that, I don't have any motivation to chop the wood. You'll do it anyway."

What is that about? Cal is correct in some mischievous way. I won't let the family freeze and I will accomplish my purposes. But he's missing the relationship, the glory of doing it together, the fact that I want him to be like me, that we participate in working out what is good.<sup>13</sup>

If you are only doing evangelism because you think you have to or else, then you are doing it out of fear. Do it out of love to work with the Father instead. This brings freedom to you. Predestination shouldn't be a demotivator to evangelism at all. We don't know who these elect are, so we are free to share the gospel with everyone and leave the results to a loving God, who knows and cares far more than we do.

Here is another passionate objection to this doctrine - what about others? The Bible has a short pithy answer. They are in the hands of God. He uses you and me to share the gospel, but he draws his people to himself. Are we afraid that we care more than he does? That he cannot overcome this free will? That people are going to hell who want to go to heaven? Not true.

Let me ask you to think about this doctrine this way - why are you a Christian? The initial gut reaction most of us have is to say, Because I believed in Jesus as my Savior. And that is true. We affirm that. But, why did you believe in Jesus as your Savior? Uh, because I was convicted of my sin and saw my need. Good answer. But why were you convicted of your sin and saw your need?

You see, we often concentrate on the secondary causes. Those causes were factors in our conversion, but they didn't bring about our conversion. If they did, then we are the cause of it. You were more humble than the others. You were smarter than others. You were more religious than the others. You, you, you.

But the Bible says that the ultimate reason you believed, were convicted and trusted in Jesus is because he loved you before the foundation of the world. He didn't love you because you were humbler than the others. Or a better Jesus believer. He loved you because he loved you. It was its own reason, its own cause, and that sent into action a plan that was carried out by the Son and applied to you by the Spirit and will not, cannot be shaken.

This should give you tremendous confidence. If you are saved because you did something, if you are loved based on your actions, then you are in a precarious position, because you know that that love can be lost. If you're loved because you're beautiful, what happens if you beauty fades? If you're loved because of your performance, what happens when you fail?

Chap Clark muses on this theme in his book about teenagers, *Hurt*. In the chapter about busyness and stress, he writes, "We feel an incredible pressure to succeed in every area, or it will all fall apart.'... What they are striving for is not the thing itself, but rather what the accomplishment will bring with it. Performance, then, is not about the touchdown, the A, or a role in the school play. It is about how others will perceive them. In other words, adolescents have learned that what matters is not who they are but what they do, or more pointedly, what they can point to and say, 'Look at me! I *am* worthy of attention and affection.' For most students, the accolades that seemed to penetrate were those that went beyond a deed and focused on their intrinsic worth. This also seemed to diffuse some of the need to perform and the stress that came along with it."<sup>14</sup>

That is a scary assessment, and I believe one we can all relate to. We're doing things to be loved. What if we were loved just for who we are, regardless of performance? Couldn't that make a difference?

Remember I said that we're looking at things from God's point of view? What we're driving at is the implications of this preordained love from God. Acts 13:48 says, *And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed.* Notice that it says that all who were appointed for eternal life believed. Not that all who believed were appointed for eternal life. How might that affect you and your thinking?

Here's how I think of it: When you became a Christian, you looked up and saw God's face. He asked you, Do you want to live? You said Yes, and you lived.

That's the story you remember; it's the part you participated in. It's not until later, not until you get some more of the family history to you realize that there was action taking place before you were born. Similar to looking through your family's pictures and asking questions to your parents, you get the back story. Here's your back story: You were dead, Not dying, but dead. On the bottom of the lake. No hope. God swam down, dragged you to shore and breathed new life into you. You sputtered death

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<sup>12</sup> Again, have heard this before, but it's fresh on my mind because of Keller.

<sup>13</sup> Keller

<sup>14</sup> Chap Clark, *Hurt* (Baker Academics: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2004), 141

from your lungs, and breathed your first breath of air, and looked into the eyes of the Father. He asked you if you wanted to live. Of course you did, and you responded to that call and did live.

Now here's the hardest question to answer, the one I cannot answer. Why did he choose you? Why did he choose me? Why does he choose some and not others? Why does he not choose all? The only answer I can have to that is number one, I do not know and number two that he choosing has nothing to do with the person, and he delights in choosing the foolish, and this gives him the most glory.

What are the results of this love? It eliminates self-loathing. If you are a Christian, God loved you before the foundation of the world! You cannot lose that sort of love, because it isn't based in anyway on your performance.

It eliminates pride – you did nothing to make God love you. It's almost a joke that you are a Christian and God likes jokes like that. It gives all the glory to God. God didn't do 99.9% of the work – he did all of it. He gets all the glory and you get none. “In the Old Testament God chose Abraham so as to bless him and to bring blessing to the nations of the earth through him (Gen. 12:1-3). Subsequently, the Lord chose Israel to be his treasured possession from among all the peoples. Her election was due solely to God's gracious decision; it had nothing to do with Israel's choice or righteous behavior (Deut. 7:6-8, 14:2). It was because the Lord loved her for himself. Here in Ephesians, the object of God's choice is *us*, that is, believers, who now belong to the people of God and *praise the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*”<sup>15</sup>

What this means is that you really can't make yourself a Christian. That's not how it works. It's not how it's ever worked. That sound terribly un-American, doesn't it? It pierces our pride, individualism and performance mentality. Christianity is not a meritocracy. Other religions, all other religions are based on the fact that you can become something. Follow the tenants of Buddha and you become Buddhist. Follow Islam and you are a Muslim. But only God can make you a Christian. And once he lavishes this love on you, it cannot be taken away ever.

### ***In Him***

We've spent a lot of time talking about this belief, this doctrine of predestination. But I want to point you that we were predestined, we were called before the foundation of the world, not in any general sense, but to something particular. If you are a Christian, you are put “in Him.” This is an incredibly important concept, and one that we'll be talking about more and more in the weeks to come because Paul brings it up over and over. This is what Paul gets so excited about, what leads him to forget his grammar and keep writing phrase after phrase.

In Him we have every spiritual blessing. In Him we are chosen. In Him we are adopted. In Him we have redemption through his blood. In Him we have forgiveness. In Him we will be given all things. In Him we receive an inheritance. In Him we are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, the down payment on what will definitely be ours in the years to come.

In Him. Are you too busy? Are you lonely? Are you stressed? Are you performing to meet others' expectations? Are you worried? Are you always looking over your shoulder? Are you comparing yourself to others? Are you feeling unattractive and unwanted? Are you proud of yourself?

All of these find at least some sort of answer in “in Him.” Jesus really matters. Being “in Him” is so important for you. Are you in Christ?

With all this talk about predestination and election, I wonder if some of you are wondering if you're in Him after all. It's a good question, a great question.

I have one question to answer that question: Do you want to be a Christian? You'll remember that if you aren't a Christian, you cannot want to be one. You have the ability but not the desire. So, think about that – if you, right now, have the desire to become a Christian, then wouldn't it make sense that that desire was put in your heart by God himself and that tonight is the instant when his plans from the foundation of the world are realized in space and time.

A missionary in Korea started to reach out the girl prostitutes to save them from their situation and then tell them about the gospel. He'd get them out and share Jesus with them. No, no, they'd say, we could never be accepted, loved or forgiven in that way. We're too bad and damaged to be loved. The missionary was frustrated that he wasn't getting through. Then he, offhandedly one time, shared about how God had loved them since the beginning of time and foreordained their election. Their eyes lit up, and they looked at him in unbelief. Someone actually loves me like that? And many believed.

You think that this is the NFL draft and you won't be selected. But God isn't putting you through the combine to test your 40-yard-dash times or how many repetitions you can do with 200 pounds on the rack. He's looking for the losers. The lost. The sinners. The needy. The sick. The broken. The despairing. He especially delights in those, for they shame the wise, strong, proficient, put together, intelligent, self-sufficient.

Do you want to be a Christian? Do you want this sort of love? Do you see yourself as needing this sort of Savior? Then go to him, for he has come to you.

**1 Corinthians 1:27-31** *But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. 30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."*

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<sup>15</sup> OBrien, 99



The Temple of Artemis (Diana), one of the ancient seven wonders of the world, as imagined in this hand-colored engraving by Martin Heemskerck (1498 - 1574) (picture found at: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple\\_of\\_Artemis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_of_Artemis))