

Reading Schedule for January 21-27, 2019

We are in the practical application of the Apostle Paul's letter to the Ephesians. What does it mean to be children of the light? How are we to treat our spouses? What is the nature of the Christian home? What might the Christian home look like? We will also anticipate the culmination of this inspiring book with the armor of God. It will be a very relevant and practical week of reading God's Word as we apply it to our lives.

January 21 – Ephesians 4:25-32: "... and do not give the devil a foothold." (v.27) I know this isn't a complete sentence, but it is an interesting point about what it means to give the devil a foothold. One translation uses this sentence, "give no opportunity to the devil." The topic is introduced in the previous verse as "anger." The Bible doesn't tell us we should never feel angry, but it points out that it is important to handle our anger properly. If we bottle it up, it can cause us to become bitter and destroy us from the inside. Unresolved anger can lead to resentment and holding a grudge, which is absolutely what the devil wants. You could call that a foothold. It's like you're stuck in your anger. So ask yourself if you are angry with someone right now. What can you do with your differences? Do not think that it will go away – in fact, it might even become bigger. These are challenging words. How might you apply them to your life?

January 22 – Ephesians 5:1-14: "Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." (v.11) This verse is especially challenging. You not only must avoid the lure of sin, and associating those who may cause us to stumble, but we are called to confront them in love. We already read the phrase "speak the truth in love" (4:15) previously, and now this is where you can apply that principle. We are instructed to expose the deeds of darkness, because our silence may be interpreted as approval. God needs people to take a stand for what is right. Christians must lovingly speak out for what is true and right. But I assure you, people will know if you are speaking to them in love versus judgment. Ask yourself, "Do I want what is best for them? Is my motivation love?" Your genuine life in Christ, along with a life of integrity, will earn your right to be heard. But if you never say anything, how will they know? How do you respond to this challenge to confront others in love?

January 23 – Ephesians 5:15-20: "Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit..." (v.18) I've thought often about what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit. This affects so many aspects of my life. How can I be wise without the wisdom of the Holy Spirit? How can I be full of joy and praise without the Spirit overflowing in my life? How will I be able to discern the Lord's will without the Holy Spirit? The ministry of the Spirit in my life is so crucial. I am reminded of the Fruit of the Spirit, which is produced in my life through the Holy Spirit's influence: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is actually a command, and it is in the present tense, so it is of ongoing importance. What happens when you are under the influence of the Holy Spirit?

January 24 – Ephesians 5:21-33: "However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband." (v.33) I know this is a wrap up to this whole section, and there are so many helpful truths about marriage that I am sure you will try to absorb. But this summary statement is very helpful to me. The call on my life as a husband is to love my wife. There is a description about what that means as Christ gave himself up for the church, so I am called to do the same for my wife. My wife's challenge is to honor me as her husband. It is very uplifting to a man

when his wife honors him. It is very encouraging and comforting to a woman when her husband loves her in a deep, meaningful and gentle way. There is a very instructional book entitled, *Love & Respect* by Dr. Emerson Eggerichs. My wife and I have benefited from his teaching as he expounds on this principle. Ask yourself, "Am I loving my wife? Am I honoring my husband?" What do you learn about marriage in this profound Scripture reading today? How might you apply it to your life?

January 25 – Ephesians 6:1-9: "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord." (v.4) Over the years, I have done quite a bit of study on family life and parenting. There are two extremes that have negative results. There are parents that are too strict and exasperate their children. Then there is the parent that has sort of an "anything goes" philosophy. Without discipline and boundaries, a child feels unloved and abandoned. An overly controlling environment, with excessive discipline, brings out fear and withdrawal in a child's life. What does it mean to display both tough and tender love at the same time? How might you be a parent, or a grandparent that is in the middle of these two extremes? Obviously discipline is very important. But so is a child's independence as well as learning from one's own mistakes. How would you define relating to children with the combination of structure and discipline, as well as affirmation and love? What words would you use to describe that kind of parenting?

January 26 – Ephesians 6:10-12: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (v.12) The topic of spiritual warfare is a very significant one, and worth contemplating. There is the admonition to put on the full armor of God, and there is the awareness of the invisible battle that we all face as followers of Christ. This spiritual battle is not make-believe. It is the strategic efforts of the devil and his demons to immobilize, impede, and hurt Christ-followers. Although we are assured of victory, we must engage in the struggle until Christ returns. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to defeat Satan. The concept of the armor will be outlined tomorrow more specifically, but God is a refuge and strength for all those who would trust in him. He will protect you. He is called a fortress to those who know him. Jesus used these words when speaking to Peter: "On this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." What assurance do you need as you face this spiritual battle?

January 27 – Ephesians 6:13-17: "Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand." (v.17) This introduces the message about the whole armor of God. Each piece of the armor represents one principle of standing firm. When we stand firm with these various spiritual resources, the devil cannot bring us down. These represent righteousness, the Gospel, faith, salvation, and the eternal Word of God. We are already equipped with this armor. All that we need to do is recognize that it is true and stand firm in FAITH. I want to emphasize the truth about faith because it is likened to a shield in this section. You can move a shield to protect yourself. Faith is mobile, and able to resist the various attacks of the enemy. How do you think the devil is trying to attack you? What does it mean for you to stand firm? What piece of the armor do you especially appreciate?

PRAYER: Pray for the strength to resist the enemy and his schemes.