

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Even as death crept close, Socrates proclaimed his teachings while standing on trial before the Athenian democracy in 399 BC. Plato witnessed Socrates' defense during which Socrates spoke these challenging words: "The life which is unexamined is not worth living." The jury would not accept Socrates' philosophy, so they condemned him to swallow hemlock and perish.¹ But his words endure.

To critique society proves dangerous and even deadly in our world. Socrates knew this. However, evading self-examination proves even more hazardous for the people of God engaged in an eternal mission. Whether it's a local church examining its organizational culture or a person considering his or her spirituality, both must self-examine for spiritual growth and effective living.

For this reason, Chuck Swindoll gives a powerful two-part series on Romans 12:6–21 to help us reflect on our own lives and churches. This *Searching the Scriptures* study will help you analyze your life's choices so you can edify God's people in the local church and shine the bright light of the gospel through your renewed life.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In Romans 1–11, Paul presented his most extended theological argument. In chapter 12, he fastened handlebars onto his doctrine so we can navigate life with it. Since God has kept His promises by decisively enacting salvation through Jesus Christ (Romans 1–11), Paul concluded in Romans 12:1–2:

And so, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to give your bodies to God because of all he has done for you. Let them be a living and holy sacrifice—the kind he will find acceptable. This is truly the way to worship him. Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Quotable

*I don't know
of a greater reason
to be used up
than to be used
up for the glory of
God in the work
of a church.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

Before we dig into our study, take a moment to turn Romans 12:1–2 into your own personal prayer for guidance. Write your prayer here:



Observation: Reading the Ingredients

What a magnificent thought to know we can encounter God in His Word. How do we begin? We simply read the text. Slowly. Carefully. Meditatively. Repeatedly. So all you need for this step is your Bible, some time, and a pen. Don't rush to the academics because God may have something to show you He didn't show the scholar. Begin by reading Romans 12:6–18.

What We Do—Romans 12:6–8

Paul first described what the church *does*. Before examining the seven gifts, look closely at Romans 12:4–6.

The church is Christ's _____ (Romans 12:5) made up of different _____ (12:5) with varying _____ (12:6). These gifts come from God's _____ (12:6).

Below, let's list the gifts and what we're supposed to do with them (12:6–8):

1. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
2. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
3. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
4. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
5. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
6. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.
7. If we have the gift of _____ then we _____.



LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

As Chuck says in his sermon, it's these spiritual gifts that make the church so magnetic in a community. Take a moment to write down anything else you observe in Romans 12:6–8.

How We Do What We Do—Romans 12:9–18

It's always helpful to consult multiple translations. You may want to take time to read this passage in the *NASB* and the *NLT*. Chuck captures the essence of this passage in a single word: *love*. According to Romans 12:9–18, *how* should we do what we do? With love.

Romans 12:9a says, “Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them.” Paul elaborated in 12:9b–18. Just look at those imperatives. You may want to underline them. How many can you find? Churn a few of them over in your mind. Then write down the three that are most meaningful to you during this season of your life.



Interpretation: Understanding the Nutrients

Now that we've observed what the passage says, we need to understand it. We want to study the passage in its original culture and language, as best we can, so we gain clarity in our understanding of God and life for today.



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S01
3

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

First, we'll pull out the Bible dictionary. If you don't have one, we recommend the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary (NUBD)*. Let's begin by looking up *Spiritual Gifts* and *Body of Christ*. If you have the *NUBD*, then you would find the first under *Gifts, Spiritual*. For *Body of Christ*, look up *Body* and then find the subheading *Figurative*. Record your insights about the purpose of the gifts and their value in the body of Christ.

In his sermon, Chuck defines the gift of prophecy (Romans 12:6) as the gift to proclaim God's truth with conviction—to proclaim what God has already revealed. Before the Bible was written, prophecy meant proclaiming what God had already revealed in the past *and* what He *will* do in the future. As you can see, prophecy has changed. Now let's consult Dr. Constable's online commentary. Visit [Lumina](#) and then click *Constable's Notes* on the right reading pane. Scroll down to read his notes on the gifts mentioned in 12:6–8. In the space below, record what you find most helpful.

Did you realize that Paul used two different words for *love* in this text? In Romans 12:9, he used the Greek word *agape* and in Romans 12:10 he used the Greek word *philadelphia*. Let's distinguish the meanings. Dr. Bill Mounce graciously provides us with a New Testament Greek dictionary for free on the Internet. As you use it, remember the following:

- Gloss: basic usage of the word
- Definition: English translations of the word
- Concordance: every occurrence of the word in the New Testament



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LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Search *agape* and *philadelphia*. Write down the fresh insights you glean from probing the dictionary.

Note Romans 12:11, “Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.” For the context of this verse, Paul calls us to labor specifically in our love for others. Paul calls us to labor in living out our renewed way of thinking because of the new power God has given us by His Spirit through Jesus.



Correlation: Comparing the Flavors

After we've interpreted the text, we should compare it with other passages in the Bible that mention a similar topic. We call this correlation.

In his sermon, Chuck says there are four lists in the New Testament which speak of the spiritual gifts. These include Romans 12:6–8, 1 Corinthians 12:27–28, Ephesians 4:11–12, and 1 Peter 4:10–11. No list details every gift, but each author referenced only some of the gifts to convey his point.

Paul's 1 Corinthians 12 contains the longest discussion of gifts. Take a moment to read this chapter and record anything Paul said that gives you a better understanding of Romans 12:5–8.

Notice 1 Corinthians 12:31: “But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way” (NASB). Spiritual gifts are necessary for you and me as we carry out God's purposes, but there remains a universal principle, the excellent way: *love*. Just as Paul transitioned from spiritual gifts to love in Romans 12:6–9, he did likewise in 1 Corinthians 12–13. So remember: the gifts describe what the church does, and *all* that we do is to be done with love.



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S01
5



Searching the Scriptures Tip

In his book *Searching the Scriptures*, the fourth step of Chuck's Bible study method is application. He directs us to ask questions like, *Is there a verse I need to memorize?* or *Is there a person I need to forgive?* **Specificity** is key to application. Get specific! Most of our spiritual growth comes from making small, incremental changes as the Lord reveals them to us in His Word or when we pray. When we apply Scripture to our lives, let's remember the words of Dr. Howard Hendricks: "Guard against the slimy ooze of indefiniteness."²



Application: Adding the Spices

Do you know what your spiritual gifts are? You may have more than one, or you may have one God wants you to use more than others. If you're unclear about your spiritual gifts, there are two ways to discover how God has gifted you.

First, which of the gifts listed in Romans 12:6–8 do you regularly exercise? Exploring the ways God uses you can help you understand the gifts He's given you. Second, which gifts do you naturally gravitate toward and enjoy? That's an easy method to discover how God wants to use you. Record your thoughts as you reflect on these questions.

Now that we've reflected on the past, take a moment to jot down ways you would like to grow in your gift-ing(s) and ministry to your church. Remember, the local church is the locus of Jesus' action in the world. He's chosen us to be stewards who carry out His purposes.



LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Let's Think about Our Church

Romans 12:6–18

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

If you're still confused about how God has gifted you, approach your pastor or elders and ask what they see in you and how you can build up the church.

Now it's time to get specific. Have you loved without sincerity? Do you cling to something that is bad instead of good? Do you serve God with enthusiasm? As we conclude, use Chuck's application principle of *specificity* to write a prayer, a confession, or an action to do this week to love someone or to help your church.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for making me a member of Your global church and for gifting me so I can build up my local church. I pray for humility so I can do, with joy and enthusiasm, what the church needs rather than what I want. In the end, it's Jesus' glory I'm aiming for and the joy of others I strive for. It's in the strong name of Jesus I pray, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. See Paul Johnson, *Socrates: A Man for Our Times* (New York: Classic Penguin, 2013), 139–84.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2017), 176–77.



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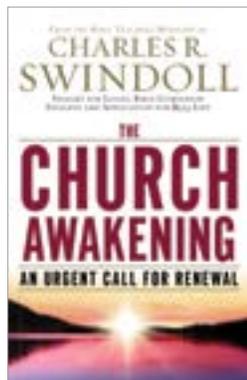
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

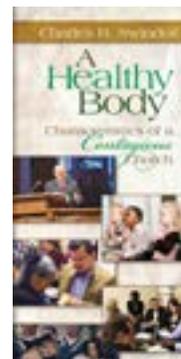
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Tools for Digging Deeper



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For the 2018 broadcast, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and sermon transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.



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LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Looking Deeper into Our Church

Romans 12:14–21

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

STUDY



LET'S BEGIN HERE

The church's most attractive quality is its unity under Jesus Christ. People from all races and social classes come together in Christ as ingredients in a cooking pot, creating a fragrant and irresistible aroma of Christ's love. Loving one another means that we lift up each other instead of compare or compete, and we give and share with open hands rather than closed fists. What a worthy endeavor!

In the previous study, we examined ourselves to discover our strengths and weaknesses. We learned about spiritual gifts and how to practice them with selfless love. Now we get even more specific in Romans 12:14–21 as Paul painted a picture of the church using peace as his base color with pronounced shades of humility and blessings. Let's look deeper into the Scriptures and discover God's design for an attractive, life-giving church.



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

In this study, we'll continue using the four-step study method Chuck Swindoll himself uses as he studies the Bible. He explains this method in detail in his book *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs*. We recommend you grab a copy if you don't already have it. As we study Romans 12:14–21 together, we'll consult excellent online resources which include Bible study notes from *Lumina*.

Because the Bible was written by people inspired by the Spirit of God, we should pray for eyes to see, ears to hear, and a soft heart to receive what God wants us to know, believe, and do. Write a prayer below in your own words requesting the Spirit's aid.

Quotable

A church is designed to reshape your life. It doesn't mean that you have a place to sit on Sunday. It means you get your thinking challenged.

— Charles R. Swindoll



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S02
1

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Looking Deeper into Our Church

Romans 12:14–21

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY



Observation: Reading Slowly

Begin by reading Romans 12:14–21. Pause and meditate over the words as you read them in context. See anything you haven't seen before? Underline in your Bible what seems important, and write any questions you have as you peruse the text.

Romans 12:14–16

Paul's letter to the Romans contains penetrating insights into God's work through Jesus Christ while also specifying *how* we should respond to the gospel with the Spirit's strength. Throughout Romans 12, Paul gave us these specifications in the form of precise commands. Some of these commands come in punchy phrases, like bullet points, listing one after another. With lists like these it is helpful to read a Bible translation that adopts a word-for-word translation method so you can better see Paul's flow of thought. So below, we've referenced the NASB version of this text:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Romans 12:14–16)

How many commands do you count? Try summarizing this list with a one-word theme.



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S02
2

LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Looking Deeper into Our Church

Romans 12:14–21

Romans 12:17–21

In Romans 12:15–16, Paul discussed how Christians should relate to Christians as well as how Christians should relate to friendly non-Christians. In Romans 12:17–21, Paul answered the question, “How should we relate to those not in our Christian community or those who are against it?” As you read Romans 12:17–21, make two lists. In the first, write down what we *are* to do. In the second, write down what we *are not* to do.

What We Are to Do	What We Are Not to Do

Interpretation: Understanding Clearly

Now that we’ve observed closely what the text says, let’s determine what it means. In this second step, called interpretation, we develop a clear understanding of what Paul meant when he wrote Romans 12:14–21.

In Romans 1–11, we learn the depth of God’s love for us in Christ, how God is redeeming the world through Christ, and how God has given us His Spirit so we might live out our redeemed lives with His power. Paul exhorted us to bless those who persecute us (Romans 12:14), rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep (12:15). Why are these our proper responses in view of God’s mercy (12:1–2)?



LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Looking Deeper into Our Church

Romans 12:14–21

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Distinguishing marks of status permeated the Roman social and legal milieu in which Paul wrote. From having reserved seats at theatrical events to the wearing of gold rings and togas adorned with purple stripes, the wealthy upper-class found ways to showcase their status. Status defined Roman society. Roman writer Pliny the Younger scoffed at the notion of a society without class distinction when he said, “Nothing is more unequal than equality itself” (c. AD 62–113). Now read Romans 12:16. Imagine living in Paul’s time. Write down what might happen if you stopped favoring the rich to gain status and, instead, served the “lowly.” What would your friends and family think?

What are the characteristics of someone who is wise according to his or her own estimation (Romans 12:16)?



Correlation: Comparing Carefully

Let’s move on to the third step in our Bible study method: correlation. We correlate when we compare what our passage says and means with other biblical passages that address a similar topic. In Romans 12:19–20, Paul quoted two Old Testament passages while discussing how we are to respond to those who persecute us.



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Looking Deeper into Our Church

Romans 12:14–21

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

The first quote in Romans 12:19 comes from Deuteronomy 32:35—a song Moses wrote for the people of Israel preparing to enter the Promised Land. When Paul quoted Deuteronomy 32:35, he wanted to relay the meaning of the verse's entire paragraph. Take a few minutes to peruse all of [Deuteronomy 32](#). In view of Deuteronomy 32, what is the main point of verse 35? What did Paul want us to think and believe when he quoted it?

Next Paul quoted Proverbs 25:21–22a in Romans 12:20. Read [Proverbs 25:21–22](#) to gain a better understanding of what these verses mean. Read the verses in the NET Bible at [Lumina](#), and reference the NET notes on Proverbs 25:22. You may even want to check out Constable's comments on this verse. Write down anything you find helpful from reading the notes. What did Paul omit in Romans 12:20 that is stated in Proverbs 25:22?

Romans 12:19 reminds us that God will take revenge on those who do evil to His people. Then Romans 12:20 develops the promise so that God not only punishes evildoers, but He also *rewards* those who do good in response to evildoers.



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Searching the Scriptures Tip

If you've never led a Bible study, this text offers a wonderful place to start. Maybe you can prepare a study this week for your family or church small group. Pick one main idea from the passage you would like to share. Then consider your audience. Are they non-Christians, new Christians, or seasoned Christians? What ideas do you and your audience share that you could use to introduce and expound upon this passage? Your lesson doesn't have to be complex or lengthy. Keeping it simple will make it more memorable. Perhaps include discussion time so you can talk about observation, interpretation, correlation, and application. A great thing about the *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method is that you can easily transfer the principles from a private study to a group setting.



Application: Receiving Personally

Now we turn to application—a crucial part of Bible study; we leave dry and lifeless if we don't apply God's Word personally to our lives. Chuck says application is “the finishing touch, the ultimate setting of the diamond in the ring of truth.”¹

Action to Practice: Weep with Those Who Weep

Romans 12 shows us how to apply to our lives the doctrine of Romans 1–11. Paul inspired us toward unity by giving us an action to practice (Romans 12:15) and an attitude to maintain (12:16). Take a moment to reflect on your life. Are you able to connect with others by weeping when they weep or rejoicing when they rejoice? If this isn't a habit already, what would it take for you to make this a practice in your relationships?



LOVING ONE ANOTHER

Looking Deeper into Our Church

Romans 12:14–21

SEARCHING
THE
SCRIPTURES

STUDY

Attitude to Maintain: Associate with the Lowly

Let's look at Romans 12:16. Even though we don't live in first-century Rome, societal status still pervades our culture and at times our churches. Thinking seriously, are you able to associate with the "lowly" without fear of what others will think? What can you do to remove the chains of peer pressure and loose the fetters of self-comparison?

Praise His name that we are no longer slaves to our corrupted nature and habits of the flesh. God has set us free in Jesus Christ. In Him we live with a newness of life only He can give. So we care. We love. We serve. Because *He* has set us free.

Response to Persecution: Return Evil with Good

An expression of this freedom that confounds the world comes through our response to persecution. When persecuted, we bless and do good (Romans 12:14, 17–21). Notice that Paul went beyond a passive reception of evil by demonstrating that Christians should actively respond to evil by doing good (12:21). Has anyone recently harmed you because of your Christian faith? What good can you do for that person in response to his or her act of evil? If you've never experienced persecution, how would you hope to respond if it should happen? Be specific.



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You that You don't return upon us wrath and justice when we commit crimes against You and others. You love us. You sent Your Son to die that we might live in Him. How radical are Christ's ways compared to the ways of the world! We pray for strength to live radically for Him because it is the good and right way and because we know that You are for us and not against us. In Jesus' name, amen.

ENDNOTE

1. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, Ill.: Tyndale House, 2017), 160.



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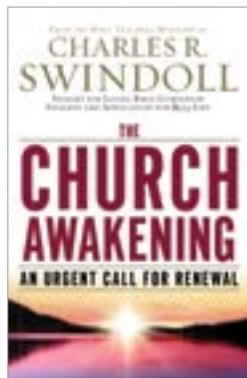
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SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

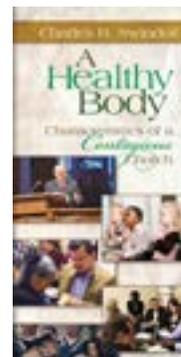
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