



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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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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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)?



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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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.





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?



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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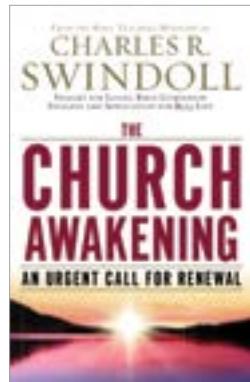
LOVING ONE ANOTHER
Looking Deeper into Our Church

Romans 12:14–21

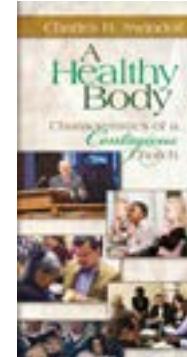
**SEARCHING
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Tools for Digging Deeper



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Softcover book



**A Healthy Body: Characteristics
of a Contagious Church**
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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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