

How to be a
Covenant
Community
of Believers

A Study of Romans 12:9-21

Prepared by Dr Andrew Corbett

The believer is not called to live an isolated life. Rather, the believer is called to be a member of a Christ-community. One of the clearest and most profound passages in the Bible on how God expects His children to live together in a Christ-community is found in Romans 12:9-21. Within this passage there are some 27 imperatives (instructions that *must* be carried out). By examining and considering these imperatives we can learn to live more fully as the Church God intended.

1.

Let love be genuine...

Romans 12:9a

1. What are the attributes of “genuine” love mentioned in First Corinthians 13?

2. Is “genuine” love an emotion (a feeling)?

3. Can you “do” genuine love without feeling loving?

4. How did Jesus change the concept of *love* in Matthew 5:44-46?

5. How did Jesus say the entire Law could be summed up in Matt. 22:37-39?

(Romans 13:10)

6. How does 1Peter 4:8 relate to Romans 12:9a?

7. Why do you think most Christians struggle to show genuine love?

2.

Abhor what is evil...

Romans 12:9b

1. What is “evil”?

2. The word “abhor” is only used twice in the New Testament. It is the superlative of hate>detest>abhor. How can Christians be loving and abhorring at the same time?

3. How is the believer’s life contrasted to that of the unbeliever according to Romans 1:29-30?

4. What falls into the category of “evil” that defines what a believer should abhor?

5. Is abhor a passive response or an active one? That is, is abhorring just a matter of *not* loving or does it require something to be done?

6. What don’t Christians hate or abhor enough?

3.

Hold fast to what is good...

Romans 12:9c

1. What is “good”? (Note 1Thessalonians 5:21)

2. What kind of circumstances would need to be happening in order for the apostle to ask his hearers to *cling to* or *hold fast to* what is good?

3. What is the relationship between *holding fast* and *enduring*?

4. In what way does Luke 8:15 show that holding fast is an essential Christian quality? (Refer also to Philippians 2:16)

5. How had Paul previously said that believers were to “stand fast” in Romans 11:20 and how do we do this?

6. Can someone live as a Christian without “holding fast” according to First Corinthians 15:2?

4.

Love one another with brotherly affection...

Romans 12:10a

There are four Greek words which might be used for the English word “love”.

Storgay – Family love, like *a mother’s love for a child*.

Eros – Sexual expression of love between a man and a woman.

Phileo – Brotherly love like a friend’s love for a friend. Greek word for *brother* is *delphia*.

Agape – God’s love. This is unconditional selfless devotion.

1. Is it possible to have Christian fellowship without showing affection?

2. Can the absence of affection between Christians in fellowship be excused by cultural appeals?

3. How do we culturally interpret Romans 16:16; 1Cor. 16:20; 2Cor. 13:12; 1Thess. 5:16; 1Peter 5:14, for today?

4. According to 1Thessalonians 4:9 what place did brotherly affection have in the early church?

5. What did Peter teach was necessary for brotherly love to be made possible (1Peter 1:22) and what is the danger of brotherly affection without meeting this pre-requisite?

5.

Outdo one another in showing honour...

Romans 12:10b

1. What does it mean to *honour*?

2. How did Jesus use the word honour in John 5:23?

3. Note Romans 13:7. Who do we owe honour?

4. Is it right to honour people? (Philippians 2:29)

5. How can we culturally apply 1Timothy 5:3 today?

6. Within the church fellowship are there those who should be shown more honour than others? (1Timothy 5:17)

7. Why is obeying 1Peter 2:17 difficult? How can we outdo each other in honouring?

6.

Do not be slothful in zeal...

Romans 12:11a

Building a great church requires people of great commitment and zeal.

1. Based on John 2:17, how zealous was Christ for God's House?

Zeal is demonstrated passion and enthusiasm. The opposite to zeal is *neglect*. Christ-followers should be the most zealous people on the planet!

2. What are we told indirectly to be zealous for in Hebrews 10:25?

In the book MADNESS, by Jossy Chacko, he tells of being a lukewarm minister. He was invited to Northern India. Jossy told them, *if you can show me people who have never heard of Jesus then I'll come over*. The Evangelist assured him he could. So Jossy went. He was taken to a village with an assistant of the Evangelist who asked villagers if they had ever heard of Jesus. They said no. One man listened intently to Jossy describe Jesus as The Son of God and the Saviour of the world. He then pressed Jossy with a question, *Are you saying that Jesus is the only Saviour of sins?* Jossy responded, *Yes I do!* Then the man cried- *Then you're 3 months too late!!!* Jossy was puzzled. The village man revealed- *My father died 3 months ago and no one told him about Jesus! Why didn't someone come here and tell us about Jesus before my father died?* The question haunted Jossy...*You're 3 months too late!* Today, Jossy heads an organisation (EMPART) that now plants 2 churches a day in Northern India! Jossy Chacko has zeal for the Lord.

3. What should Christians especially be zealous about?

-
-
4. According to Titus 2:14, what should believers be especially zealous about?

-
5. What might Peter have meant in 1Peter 3:13

7

Be fervent in spirit...

Romans 12:11b

The word “fervent” is the Greek word: *zeo* which means *hot, boiling, earnestly*.

1. Based on James 5:17, how did Elijah pray that was different to most people?

2. If most Christians obeyed 1Corinthians 15:58 what affect would it have?

3. Paul tells the Corinthians (2Corinthians 8:7) that there were certain things they *needed* to excel in. List the things he tells them to excel in and discuss *how* believers could do this.

4. From later on in this passage (2Corinthians 8:22) how do we know that Paul regarded enthusiasm (fervour, zeal, earnestness) as such an important quality for those who served within the church?

Enthusiasm. Don't fake it – faith it!

5. What can happen to others in a church if someone is full of zeal or fervour? (Note 2Corinthians 9:2)

6. Based on Ephesians 6:7 what motive should we have for our fervency?

Amen.

8.

Serve the Lord...

Romans 12:11c

The Church is a volunteer movement. Without volunteers who serve the Lord by serving people, the Church simply could not function. This attitude of service for the believer stands in contrast to the “What’s in it for me?” attitude of the world. We are to serve the Lord with an attitude of a servant.

1. Noting Romans 16:18, what does Paul say causes some believers to *not* serve the Lord?

2. According to 1Timothy 3:13, what effect does serving the Lord in the church have on a believer’s faith?

3. Romans 14:18 mentions the benefits of serving the Lord well. What do these benefits include?

4. Based on 1Peter 4:11 how are we to serve the Lord?

5. In what way do you currently serve the Lord? Could you serve Him better?

6. How does Luke 17:8 address the attitude of a servant?

7. What is the relationship between leading and serving according to Christ? (Luke 22:26) How can you serve this group?

Amen.

9.

Rejoice in hope...

Romans 12:12

To rejoice is celebrate. To rejoice in hope is to celebrate what God has done, what God will do - despite whatever circumstances we are going through. This is the essence of *hope*. Hope says that God has better times ahead for us. Ultimately, our resurrection is the greatest result of our hope (1Peter 1:3, 13).

1. Note Romans 5:1-5? Based on this passage, why should we have hope and how is this hope developed?

2. The world is subject to futility (disappointment, disaster, pain, suffering, loss) by God (Romans 8:20). Based on Ephesians 2:12, how is the Christian better able to handle life's futility?

3. Note how God is described in Romans 15:13 and how Paul says we can abound in hope-

4. What is greatest source of our hope? (Romans 15:4)

5. In what way is our hope in God an opportunity to share Christ with those who do not know Him? (1Peter 3:15)

6. How is rejoicing different for the Christian than the non-Christian? (Phil. 3:1)

Amen.

10.

Be patient in tribulation...

Romans 12:12b

Our culture does not prize patience. In fact, it prizes the extraordinarily quick. One of the stories that I have made a right of passage for each of my four children is the story of the Hare and the Tortoise. It is a story that extols patience.

But it is a counter-cultural story. You will have already have been conditioned from birth to “hurry up”. Thus, when we read the Bible commanding us to be patient in tribulation, we generally have little to no idea what it means. But understanding this key to successful discipleship will help us to build better lives and a stronger church.

1. Note 1Corinthians 13:4. I once challenged a couple whose marriage was in trouble and were now separated. After years of neglect, the wife had had enough. In essence, the husband had actually violated his marriage vows even though he appealed that he had not been unfaithful. Love had gone out of their marriage. I asked the husband if he loved his wife. He said yes. I then asked him if he was prepared to be patient for his wife’s heart to be healed? He again said yes. I then asked *but what if it takes 12 months?* To this he replied, *No*, and then walked out on his marriage. Based on 1Corinthians 13:4, how is love to demonstrated- especially in times of tribulation?
-

2. What challenges might we as a church face in trying to apply First Thessalonians 5:14?
-

3. In Revelation 1:9, note what John describes as the present conditions of the Christians of his day. Note also how he mentions they were able to deal with their circumstances-
-

4. What promise did Jesus make to the church in Revelation 3:10 and why did He make it?
-

5. How likely is tribulation for the believer according to what Jesus said in Matthew 13:21? What does this tell us about being a Christian?
-

Amen.

11.

Be constant in prayer.

Romans 12:12c

You also must help us by prayer, so that many will give thanks on our behalf for the blessing granted us through the prayers of many. (2Corinthians 1:11)

Christianity is prayerful. While prayer is talking with (not just to) God, it is much more. Prayer is integral to someone *becoming* and *remaining* a Christian. But prayer is not merely a set of *magical* incantations. This is why we never use the magical description of “prayer power”. Mysteriously, God has ordained preaching *and* prayer as the sacred means by which the Gospel is shared and received. Similarly, in God’s wisdom He has decreed that His purpose is furthered by His people praying. Hence, Paul could write 2Corinthians 1:11 where he appealed for prayer to be offered so that the Gospel would be received by more people. Since the Epistle to the Romans is largely about *salvation* the context of *being constant in prayer* seems to be about supporting the goal of seeing others saved.

1. Who should we particularly pray for to be saved according to 1Timothy 2:1-4 and why might this be prioritised?

2. Why is Philippians 1:9 regarded as one of the most sublime pastoral prayers of the New Testament?

3. According to Philippians 4:6, how is prayer the antidote to worry?

4. Based on Colossians 4:12, why was Epaphras struggling and what was he hoping would be achieved?

5. What did Peter write would aid our praying? (1Peter 4:7)

May God help us to constantly pray. Let’s pray.

Amen.

12.

Contribute to the needs of the saints

Romans 12:13a

1. What quality do the righteous display in contrast to the wicked? (Psalm 37:21)

2. According to Proverbs 14:31 who is honoured by godly generosity?

3. Who would benefit from an application of First Timothy 6:18?

4. Why would the Lord bless the generous based on Proverbs 14:21?

5. What does God promise for those who are generous? (2Corinthians 9:11)

6. How should followers of Christ apply Matthew 5:42?

7. In a media-driven age that cultivates public relations, how should Christians live out Matthew 6:2?

8. In what ways can this small group apply a combination of Romans 12:13 and Galatians 6:10?

Amen.

13.

Seek to show hospitality

Romans 12:13b

“Practice hospitality. Why? This is a worship service, not a seminar on successful living. What does hospitality have to do with God? If it doesn't have to do with God, it is simply of no interest in a church that aims to be God-centered and God-saturated. The mark of a God-besotted Christian is that you

always answer the question why you do something by referring to God as we know him in Jesus Christ... Or here is another way to put it: when we practice hospitality we experience the thrill of feeling God's power conquer our fears and our stinginess and all the psychological gravity of our self-centeredness. And there are few joys, if any, greater than the joy of experiencing the liberating power of God's hospitality making us a new and radically different kind of people, who love to reflect the glory of his grace as we extend it to others in all kinds of hospitality” - John Piper

1. The Gospel empowers the believer to live with a new heart. Our old heart struggles to consider others. Ezekiel called it, “a heart of stone” (Ezek. 36:26). When we receive this new heart from the Spirit, we care for others. This new ability to care was regarded as an evidence of genuine new birth by the early church. List the practical ways Paul told his readers how they could tell whether a widow was a true follower of Christ in First Timothy 5:10-

-
2. Apparently, the writers of the New Testament were concerned that believers would lose their interest in showing hospitality. How do we know this based on Hebrews 13:2 and amazing motivation did they give to urge believers to keep showing hospitality?

When Kim and I were just Kim and Kim's husband, we were often invited over to other people's places to share a meal. When we had Tyrone, the number of these invitations dropped off significantly. By the time we had four children it became uncommon for us to be invited out. We are now in the phase of renovating our old house. One of the things we have insisted on in our redevelopment is an outdoor entertainment area where we can host our large family with another large family. In the meantime when Kim and I want to show hospitality to a large number of people we use the church building. Once we cooked and catered for 95 people when we put on a surprise lunch for those attending church one Sunday morning.

3. But it's not only those who don't get invited to others' places for a meal that sulk. What does First Peter 4:9 command?

-
4. What is the link between hospitality and the spread of the Gospel? (Note Matthew 10:11-13)

We want our homes to be hospitable. We also want to make our spiritual home hospitable by looking out for visitors, serving them, and inviting them back. Churches that reach out and grow are hospitable churches.

Amen.

14.

Bless those who persecute you

Romans 12:14a

In one of the best books ever written on parenting, *Shepherding Your Child's Heart* (written by Tedd Tripp), he makes the case that most parents don't "shepherd" their children with the Gospel. He gives an example of a child coming home and reporting to their parents that they had been hit by a bully at school. Most Christian will tell their children to either not hit back or stand up for their rights or tell a teacher. Tedd Tripp says this is reasonable advice, but it's not Gospel advice.

1. Based on Romans 12:14a what advice could a parent give to their child that would constitute "Gospel advice"?
-

2. Ricky is having brother-in-law problems. Ricky's brother-in-law is demeaning and rude. Ricky has just been yet again deeply offended by him. But Ricky loves God and wants most to please Christ. You have just been challenged by Romans 12:14a and the words of Christ in Matthew 5:44. How would counsel Ricky?
-

3. Have you ever heard of someone you know surprising their persecutor with a "Gospel response"? Discuss.
-

4. Peter wrote his epistles to persecuted Christians. He reinforces the Gospel response of Romans 12:4a in First Peter 3:9 but includes two reasons why believers should do so. What are these two reasons?
-

5. The early Christians mystified their persecutors by their Gospel response to them. What is so marvellous about the connection between Luke 6:28, Acts 12:1-5, 1Peter 2:13-14?
-

We are not only charged by the Lord not to be bitter toward those who revile us, we are actually commanded to *bless* those do so! We do this by giving them gifts, praying for them, speaking well of them, and protecting their welfare.

Father, I can sometimes barely forgive those who hurt me let alone bless them! Please help me to forgive AND bless people who mistreat or slander me. I need Your grace to do this. Thank You for it. Amen.

15.

Bless and do not curse them

Romans 12:14b

Following Christ requires the grace of God. This means that we wake up each morning aware that we are at this moment needing God's grace for this day because yesterday's has all gone. The prayer that sounds like-"God I can't do this!" is the kind of prayer that is actually a plea for God's grace if it is proceeded with, "Please help me." And perhaps there is no greater need for God's grace to live the Christian life than when it comes to how we respond to those who demonstrate their hate for us. The Gospel does not call us to ignore them. Neither does it call us simply resist taking revenge.

1. Who is the object of Romans 12:14b?

2. How does Luke 6:28 make Christianity different to all other religions?

3. What is one of the most powerful instruments of blessing and cursing according to James 3:10?

4. How does First Corinthians 4:12 reveal the apostle Paul's spiritual maturity?

5. Who is changed by applying Romans 12:14b?

6. If you have lived your Christian life by cursing those who have injured you, what should you do now?

Amen.

16.

Rejoice with those who rejoice

Romans 12:15a

The Gospel calls us to bless and to rejoice when someone else is blessed. In a competitive world we are conditioned to feel that we have missed out if someone else is blessed in some way. Therefore, a heart untrained by the Gospel *resents those who are rejoicing*. It is a hallmark of Christ-like maturity when the lime-light is on someone else and rather than feel envy, we can truly rejoice in honouring them. (See 1Corinthians 12:26) What reasons do you have to rejoice now?

1. What are some ways we can rejoice with those who are rejoicing?

2. Note First Corinthians 3:1-3. What behaviours does the apostle Paul regard as an indication that a believer was spiritually immature?

3. Biblically, the opposite of *immaturity* is *spiritual*. What does Galatians 6:1 say that the “spiritual” will do for those who *immature* or “caught in sin”?

4. How can we help a fellow believer who does not rejoice with another believer?

5. According to Christ’s words in Luke 10:20, why do we all have reason to rejoice, and do you?

6. Why did Peter say that every believer should rejoice? (1Peter 1:8)

Amen.

17

Weep with those who weep

Romans 12:15b

Perhaps nothing says *I love you* more than tears. When someone else weeps for us, we have found someone who cares. We often use the expression “moved to tears” to describe someone’s deep compassion for another. Only the strongest people cry.

1. In Job 30:25 we read that Job often wept (before his suffering). Who did he weep for, and why did he weep for them?

2. What did Christ promise those who wept in compassion for others? (Lk. 6:21)

3. Note John 11:35. Why did Jesus weep?

4. Why did the Psalmist feel that God would hear his prayers according to Psalm 39:12?

5. Tears are often associated with prayers of passionate appeal. Note Psalm 56:8. What “book” do you think the Psalmist may have had in mind?

6. There is a time to cry (Eccl. 3), there is another time to rejoice and laugh (Ps. 126:5). What do you need to develop in order to know when it is appropriate to weep with or for someone?

7. What could you pray for yourself if you find it hard to cry tears of compassion?

Would we shed more tears if we were closer to the heart of God? (Psalm 119:136)

Amen.

18.

Live in harmony with one another.

Romans 12:16a

“Live”, not just “meet together occasionally”. One of the hallmarks of social maturity is learning how to get along with people who are different. This is one of the chief goals of parents for their children (“socialising” them). One of the hallmarks of Christian maturity is being able to get along with other Christians who have differences with us over matters of opinion, worship styles, and intellectual appreciation. Learning how to do love within a church community means that we become considerate of others, even when we don’t agree with them. This might look like cooking them a meal when they are sick, or mowing their grass when they are on holidays, or washing their car while they are undergoing chemotherapy. It could also look like taking them for a coffee, or going out to lunch with them and talking. How well do you know those you are different to in your church?

1. Is there anything unusual about the prayer found in Romans 15:5? Would you like someone to pray this for you?

2. What is necessary to do in order to get along with someone quite different to us?

3. Are there just some people you can never get along with? Do you need to get along with everyone in your local church?

4. Churches are described in the New Testament as being made up of different people (nationalities, languages, social standing, educational backgrounds, religious backgrounds, former sexual identities, and both genders). This is why some call the local church: “heterogenous” (hetero=*different* + genous=*a kind*). If everybody in a local church was the same it would be described as *homogenous*.
What does God do with different people who come to Christ (Eph. 2:15)?

5. What is the difference between *unity* and *unison*? Which one better reflects the word: *harmony*?

6. Is there someone in your local church that you just can’t get along with? Is this a bad thing within a church?

7. When offence happens within a church, how can Romans 12:16a be applied?

Amen.

19.

Do not be haughty.

Romans 12:16b

“Haughty” is a way of thinking. It comes from the Latin word *haut* which means “high”. For a church family to be strong, its members must be careful not to think too “highly” of themselves. Eugene Petersen renders this-
“*Don’t be stuck up.*” People who are haughty are

generally not prepared to mix with the others in the church. They consider themselves to be “above” others. They do not receive correction because they are unteachable. They prefer to isolate themselves rather than enter into meaningful fellowship. This is one reason why small group Bible study meetings are so important in building a healthy, Biblical, Covenant community.

1. In what did the Apostle Paul introduce this chapter (Romans 12) with a similar command?

2. How is Psalm 131 the antidote for haughtiness?

3. Paul lists the qualities of a haughty person in First Timothy 3:2-5. List and discuss at least 6 of these negative qualities. Discuss what the antidotes to these qualities are. Why does Paul tell believers to resort to 1Tim. 3:5 with haughty people?

4. The haughty person is often frustrated with God. How could understanding James 4:6 help the haughty person to be less frustrated?

5. Note First Corinthians 13:4. Love is the goal of following Christ. Based on this verse, it seems that the opposite of love is not necessarily *hate*, but something else. What does First Corinthians 13:4 reveal?

May God help us to grow as a community of fellow believers who know how to get along with each other, care for each other, pray for each other and support each other- no matter our station in life.

Amen.