

APPLICATION

- Are there people in church who are very different from you that you are having challenges relating to? How would you treat them differently starting this week?
- Are there people whom you have chosen not to preach the gospel to because of some personal bias or prejudices? Pray for these people to have an encounter with God and ask Him to prepare you to be open to reaching out to them as well.
- Unity in the church means believers accept each other in spite of their differences. What practical thing can you do to preserve unity with fellow believers?

PRAYER

- Thank God for His sovereign hand at work in your life. Pray that you will always hold on to the truth of His sovereignty whether or not you understand what He is doing.
- Ask God to reveal to you any biases or prejudices you may have toward an individual or a group of people. Ask God for the grace to see them through His eyes and move in His mercy and compassion.
- Pray for unity in the church. Declare that God's purposes would be accomplished as His people set aside their differences and work together.

WARM-UP

- Have you ever been excluded from activities at work, school, or play? How did it feel?
- Tell about a time you were unexpectedly included in a group or activity. What happened?
- Have you ever been part of a group with members who were very different from you? How did you get along?

WORD *For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."* **ROMANS 9:15**

There is much theological debate among Christians regarding certain details in Romans 9 and 11. Here we will not discuss these areas under debate, but instead focus on an area of agreement: the central and overall message contained in Romans 9 and 11, which is the sovereignty of God.

There were two kinds of Christians in Rome: the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers. The Jewish believers thought of themselves as superior because they had the Law, the promises, the covenants, and the human lineage of Christ. The Gentile believers thought of themselves as superior because the vast majority of Jews rejected Christ and most of the believers in Rome were Gentiles. Paul wrote to address this disunity by talking about how God is accomplishing His sovereign will through both Jews and Gentiles.

1 | God sovereignly chose to be faithful to His covenant with Israel.

15For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. 16So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy." ROMANS 9:15,16

Paul expressed his anguish in the letter to the Romans. Though God had great purposes and promises for Israel, the great majority of Israelites had rejected Jesus as their Messiah. In spite of this, God's promises and purposes for Israel did not fail. God has chosen the Jews for His purposes not because of anything they had done, but because He had sovereignly chosen them to be His people and objects of His mercy. God continues to offer His mercy even to the Jews who reject Him (Romans 11:23). In the same way, just because people have rejected Christ or have not been responsive to the gospel does not mean that God has given up on them. How can knowing God's mercy help you look differently at difficult people and those who have persistently rejected the gospel?

2 | God sovereignly chose to extend mercy to the Gentiles.

As indeed he says in Hosea, "Those who were not my people I will call 'my people,' and her who was not beloved I will call 'beloved.'" ROMANS 9:25

God did not discount the Gentiles (non-Jews) who put their faith in Him. Instead, He sovereignly chose to have mercy on those who were not originally His people. We, as non-Jews, can be grateful for this. In the same way that God

told the Jews not to consider Gentiles as "outsiders" in the faith, He is telling us today not to exclude anyone who does not fit our own notion of what Christians should be like. In His sovereignty, God is calling all kinds of people to be in a covenant relationship with Him. According to Philippians 2:3, how are we to consider others?

3 | God sovereignly chose to put Jews and Gentiles together.

For if you were cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, the natural branches, be grafted back into their own olive tree. ROMANS 11:24

God not only included Jews and Gentiles among those He made righteous, but He also put them together as one people and one body. Paul uses the imagery of olive trees. Jews are the natural branches of His cultivated olive tree that have been cut off because of their unbelief. Gentiles belong to a different olive tree that is wild. However, Jews and Gentiles who put their faith in God are both grafted into the cultivated tree. They are now together, obtaining life from the same source, Jesus Christ. Therefore, they should no longer discount one another but rather should consider each other as belonging together. What does this say about how we should relate to fellow believers who are totally different from us?
