

*Finally, brothers, rejoice. Be perfected, be comforted, be of the same mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you. Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the saints greet you. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, God's love, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.*

You all know what a hinge is, right? It is a device that connects one thing to another—but then so does epoxy glue and a nail and a screw. You could use any of those to connect your door to the door frame, right? Would they do the same job? [no] Why not—what is the difference? [The others wouldn't let the door open and a hinge would.]

If you want to go in (or out) through a door, a hinge would be a better choice. If you want out, you don't need a bolt or a nail or glue—you need a hinge. A hinge helps you open a door.

Hinges are great devices. You put a set on your door and they help you go in and out of your house. If you only had a latch and no hinges you would have to catch the door every time you turned the knob—and that won't work.

A hinge has two main parts. Each one is fastened to an object—in this case one is fastened to your house and the other is fastened to the door. The maybe the most important part is the pin that fits through each half—that is what the hinges turn on. That is what makes the hinge moveable. Without a hinge you can't get in and watch *America Has Talent* or *Dancing With the Stars*—unless you climb in a window.

That is one kind of hinge. There are other hinges in the world—they are not made of metal or plastic, but they still connect one thing to another and one part still turns on the other.

In that kind of hinge, one possibility depends on something else. We might say that one thing “hinges” on another thing. “I want to go fishing, but that hinges on the weather...” “I want a new car, but that hinges on whether I get a raise this year or not.”

Relationships often hinge on showing love and respect—and remembering special days on the calendar. Valentine's Day just passed and I hope you remembered it—and that you remember those birthdays and anniversaries, because a lot of things may hinge on that remembering. I guess I'm lucky because my birthday and Vonna and my anniversary are on the same day. If I remember one, I'll remember the other.

Paul assumes something in verse 11. He assumes that being in the presence of God is better than being off in some dark corner somewhere by ourselves. I assume the same thing. I also assume that we, as children of God, desire that the peace and the love of God be made real to us. I assume that we like it when we are close to God and he is close to us. Paul assumed that of the Corinthians even though he had had so much trouble out of them and even though they had been so rebellious. He still believed that they desired to be close to God—and I assume it of each of you today.

This is the last section of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians. This is his conclusion—a time for him to tie up all the loose ends and make sure they understand.

SO, he reaches into his spiritual toolbox and he pulls out a set of hinges.

In a sense, we might say he is asking some questions. “Do you want God to be real to you?” “Do you want God's peace and love to blanket your life?” “Do you want to bask in the presence of God?”

“If you do,” he says, “here are some hinges...”

Actually, Paul produced a set of five hinges here. It is an important list, though not a complete list. There many things that will have a direct effect on our relationship with God, but Paul deemed these important enough to leave them as the conclusion of this letter.

If we desire the presence and the love and the peace of God like we find in verse 11, Paul says that that hinges on five things.

The first hinge is rejoicing.

“Finally brethren, rejoice...” You may have a translation that says “farewell” instead of rejoice but the best translation is rejoice.

So here is a test—what does Paul say the first hinge is? [Wait for answer.] That's right, rejoice [Say it as flat and toneless and with the least excitement possible.]

NOT like that. Rejoice! What does that relationship turn on? REJOICING!

Yet we are often like the world around us. We stumble out of bed and if it wasn't for the timer on our coffee pot, we would probably never get out the door.

Life can be pretty hard these days, can't it? Seems like we work work work and still don't get ahead—we just don't slide back as far as we would have.

I don't know about you, but when I was growing up they kept saying that electronics and automation and robots would make life so easy that we would only work a couple of days a week and have the rest of the time for fun and pleasure. But I think the truth is just the opposite. It seems that our jobs and relationships and finances and even our spiritual lives take more work than ever.

On top of that it is almost tax time :)

No wonder we may look like prunes drinking lemon juice. I'm afraid that if some of us smiled, we might break our face.

But of course, Paul isn't really talking about temporary, earthly circumstances. He isn't talking about the alarm that didn't go off this morning or the hot water heater that quit working.

Rejoice! In the love of Christ. That is one thing you always have if you are a Christian. Rejoice! In the fact that we believe that there is more than just this. Rejoice! In the sending of the Holy Spirit to guide and comfort. Rejoice! In Christian relationships. Rejoice! In eternal life.

The next hinge is “perfect yourselves.”

How can that be—I think we can look around, even in here, and say nobody's perfect (and if we are going to do an exercise like that, I hope you've got a mirror.) One of my brothers-in-law used talk a lot about the hypocrites in church—and in a sense he was right. No Christian is perfect day after day after day. We may have a good run from time to time, but we always fail.

Christians are not perfect and churches are not perfect. The idea is that if you looked and looked and finally found a perfect church—as soon as you joined it it wouldn't be perfect anymore.

In the translation of this hinge-word we also see two translation possibilities. There are two ways to understand “perfect yourselves.” It can be translated “perfect” or it can be translated as “restore.” So, as you try to apply this hinge in your life, it is fine to read it as read “perfect” but keep “restore” in the back of your mind—to be re-joined or re-made. Also, the Greek speaks to continuing action.

God knows we will never be fully perfect or fully restored and we will never have perfect relationships. Humanity gets in the way—but we are to continue towards perfection and restoration in action AND in relationships.

God knows we won't get finished, but requires we work in that direction by understanding God MADE us different and with different abilities and talents—and different strengths and weaknesses. God wants us to take the initiative when there is a break in fellowship. If fellowship with another Christian is broken, God expects YOU to be the one to make the effort to restore the relationship. Even if you are right. Even if you are DEAD right and they were DEAD wrong.

We are all different people with different ideas and abilities, but God expects us to work together as one as we do his work—each one filling our place in the process and moving toward full fellowship and perfection.

The next hinge is “be of good comfort.”

This can mean to exhort or it can mean to encourage one another—and the second is the best translation. If we want the peace of God and the love of God to draw near to us, we in the body of Christ are to encourage each other. We are to be diligent in our duty to love one another and do good works for each other.

If one of us has distress—outward or inward—physical, mental, or spiritual—the other should be there johnny-on-the-spot to give comfort and support and love. Even if we are wrong and even if we brought it on ourselves. Comfort in word and in deed.

This isn't meddling in each other's business—this is just making ourselves available in love. If the other person doesn't want outside help we should respect that but still be ready to provide what they do need. A card or a note or a good word is almost always appropriate. Encourage one another in the love of God.

The next hinge is being of one mind.

I don't believe this means in all the details of our faith. Paul isn't saying that we all have to believe exactly the same. In his other teachings he allows for a fairly wide variation—such as marrying or not marrying, eating meat sacrificed to idols or not doing it—leaving these things and others up to the individual and God. Those specific things may not be a part of our faith, but it shows that we don't have to be the same.

Being of one mind doesn't mean that we have to believe in the same in the form and time-frame for creation, biblical inspiration, the second coming of Christ, or even the details of the ordinances such as baptism or communion.

What Paul means is that we are to be of one mind in our service to Christ. We are to be of one mind in our pursuit of the work he has for us as a body of Christ—as a church. We are to be heading in the right direction as we seek to make a difference in the world around us. And we can do that with much variety.

By the way, I think this is something we do well—and that you have been doing well for some time. As Zion heads in the right direction, there is a huge variety in the work and actions and details of how we are getting there. Good for you—but remember to be in one accord as we do his will and work.

I think that as he was writing this letter, Paul was most worried about the factions that had come into play at Corinth. Being of “one mind” means not to be fighting over who is right and who is wrong or who is the best leader. Being of one mind means that the little details don't matter and that God's work and God's church do.

The last hinge is “live in peace.”

Inside the church and outside the church. Peace with members and peace with the world. I grew up Baptist and one thing we are known for is church fights and church splits. And, as you know it isn't just Baptists either. Churches or Christian individuals should NEVER be known for their fighting or bad attitudes or contrariness. But sometimes we are, aren't we?

And we wonder why our witness and our influence falls as flat as a proverbial pancake or fritter.

When churches fight—even when WE win—we always lose. We lose as a church and as individuals. Even God loses.

Paul says that if we—as individuals and as a church—want to be immersed in the love of God, the peace of God, the grace of Christ, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit—that hinges on certain things.

Rejoice. Be perfect or restored. Hold each other up. Be of one mind. And live in peace.

What do hinges do at your house? They help you open the door. These hinges help us open the door to total fellowship with God and with each other. The God of peace and comfort and joy and love will be with us and he will be more real to each of us.