



**LAKEWOODS DRIVE
CHURCH OF CHRIST**
Praising. Teaching. Training. Serving.

HAL HAMMONS

GOSPEL PREACHER

“The preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.” — Ecclesiastes 12:10

December 10, 2020
Georgetown, Texas

Greetings in the Lord, brethren! I always seem to be apologizing for my tardiness. This month, though, I wanted to wait a bit until the circumstances had come together a bit so I could bring you official good news instead of merely speculating.

The good news is, we have officially installed elders at Lakewoods Drive! The process was a bit more protracted than I would have preferred (COVID complications, chiefly). But the men unanimously voted to move forward in our November business meeting, and the three appointees were accepted with no reservations by the members. The men are myself, David Jennings, and Doug Yakesch. I reiterated my preference to serve outside the eldership, but the men unanimously said they would much prefer a third shepherd to join David and Doug. The church has a very bad history with two-man elderships, so their hesitation is understood. That said, I am excited about the work even more than I was in our last report, and we expect good things in the immediate and long-term future.

Speaking of good things, we have had two couples place membership with us since our last report. One is a senior couple from Liberty Hill that has wanted to worship with us for years but did not approve of the previous preacher; one is a young couple that has moved into the area. Both families are already contributing to the work, and we expect that to continue and increase. Other visitors from the area church community are becoming regulars, and we hope to have more membership news soon.

The business meeting had intended to revisit my salary this month; I expect the eldership will do it instead. They have already committed to a sizeable increase in my salary, and they may add more. As a result I have already begun the process of turning back support. I hope to be able to turn back even more beginning next month.

I am beginning a new podcast on January 7 to go along with our Twenty Pages a Week study through the Bible. I hope you will be able to follow along with this and my other online efforts. Please reach out with any suggestions, criticisms or comments, and visit with us in Georgetown whenever you have an opportunity.

Brotherly,

Hal Hammons.
850-602-8420

From the desk of

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GOSPEL PREACHER

"The preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly." — Ecclesiastes 12:10

February 24, 2020
Pensacola, Florida

To the elders of the Eastside church of Christ in Baytown, Texas. Greetings in the Lord. I am grateful for the support you have provided in times past, and I trust the work goes well for you.

I am writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity for the Hammons family. I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

The church in Georgetown officially separated from its preacher in January. He had been preaching error with regard to apostolic authority and its applications to the local work. The group set measure in place to adjust his style of preaching, but he resisted. Ultimately he and one other member announced plans to begin a new, non-denominational work in town. The group, suitably horrified, agreed quickly to separate from the preacher immediately. He went peacefully, along with the member who was supporting him; at last notice they were worshiping in town with an institutional group.

The incident left the church somewhat cash-poor and without its largest (by far) contributor. What remains is a core group of between five and eight families that love one another and are committed to the work. Another family or two may leave soon for reasons unrelated to the recent uprising, so for now they are being conservative with the level of support they are able to offer.

As a result, I am left trying to raise \$5,000 in monthly support. This is by far the most support I have ever had to raise, so I want to have some idea of how much may be available before I make a full commitment.

Feel free to reach out to me for more information. Examples of my recent work can be seen at my website, halhammons.com. You can also listen to my podcast, *Citizen of Heaven*, which I plan to continue whether or not we make this move.

I am also including the phone number for Kelly DeVoll, a long-time member at Lakehills Drive and son of gospel preacher James DeVoll.

Thank you for your consideration, and God bless you in your corner of His vineyard.

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Pensacola, Florida

To the elders of the Benchley church of Christ. Greetings in the Lord.

I am writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity for the Hammons family. I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

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March 3, 2020

Pensacola, Florida

To the elders of the Stallings Drive church of Christ in Nacogdoches, Texas. Greetings in the Lord.

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To the elders of the Kleinwood church of Christ. Greetings in the Lord.

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To the elders of the Oaks-West church of Christ in Burnet, Texas. Greetings in the Lord.

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To Jerry King and the brethren with the West Allen church of Christ. Greetings in the Lord.

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To the elders of the Cy-Fair church of Christ in Cypress, Texas. Greetings in the Lord.

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February 25, 2020
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To the elders of the Northwest church of Christ in Austin, Texas. Greetings in the Lord.

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To the elders of the Campbell Road church of Christ in Garland, Texas. Greetings in the Lord.

I am writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity for the Hammons family. I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

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To the elders of the South Georgia Street church of Christ in Amarillo, Texas. Greetings in the Lord. I am writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity for the Hammons family. I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

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February 26, 2020
Pensacola, Florida

To the elders of the Lavon church of Christ. Greetings in the Lord.

I am writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity for the Hammons family. I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

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February 26, 2020
Pensacola, Florida

To the elders of the Jackson Heights church of Christ in Columbia, Tennessee. Greetings in the Lord. Matt Bassford suggested I write to you concerning my current need for financial support.

I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

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Pensacola, Florida

To the elders of the Cedar Park church of Christ. Greetings in the Lord.

I am writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity for the Hammons family. I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

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February 26, 2020
Pensacola, Florida

To the elders of the Lavon church of Christ. Greetings in the Lord.

I am writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity for the Hammons family. I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

The church in Georgetown officially separated from its preacher in January. He had been preaching error with regard to apostolic authority and its applications to the local work. The group set measure in place to adjust his style of preaching, but he resisted. Ultimately he and one other member announced plans to begin a new, non-denominational work in town. The group, suitably horrified, agreed quickly to separate from the preacher immediately. He went peacefully, along with the member who was supporting him; at last notice they were worshiping in town with an institutional group.

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I am also including the phone number for Kelly DeVoll, a long-time member at Lakehills Drive and son of gospel preacher James DeVoll.

Thank you for your consideration, and God bless you in your corner of His vineyard.

Brotherly,

Hal Hammons.
850-602-8420

Kelly DeVoll
512-630-4401

From the desk of

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March 5, 2020

Pensacola, Florida

To the elders of the Southside church of Christ in Pasadena, Texas. Greetings in the Lord.

I was thrilled to hear from Bro. Dee Bowman of your interest in the Lord's work going on in Georgetown, as well as my possible part in it. He indicated you wanted a clearer picture of the situation there. I am pleased to offer what information I have.

Georgetown, I am told, is the sixth fastest growing community in the country. What once was a sleepy retirement community is now a thriving city of nearly 100,000. Unfortunately, the church has always struggled to maintain a strong, conservative presence. Part of this, no doubt, is the generally liberal (social, political and spiritual) mentality in the Austin area; however, Williamson County trends much more conservative than Travis County. And in the last 20 years or so, the Northwest and Cedar Park churches have begun to thrive. As much as that is a blessing to those communities, it has tended to compound the problems at the Lakewoods Drive church in Georgetown. The smaller, struggling churches in the area (of which there are many) have many Christians who are willing to drive an extra half-hour or more to assemble with a healthy, growing group of Christians.

I cannot speak definitively to reasons why the church has not grown more than it has over the last 40 years or so. A lack of leadership surely plays a large role. I believe the church has had elders only once, and that was for a brief period 10 years or so ago. One of the elders discovered that one of his sons was engaged in an ungodly, rebellious lifestyle and felt compelled to resign; the other at the time was the large contributor to whom I referred in the previous letter.. (I am including a copy of that letter for reference.) That left the church without strong leadership just at the time they needed it the most.

Brad Helgerson was converted out of the world while Ron Cox was the regular evangelist at Lakewoods Drive. He was (and is) intelligent and motivated, and soon he began to prepare to preach the gospel for a living.. When Bro. Cox left, the elders (without consulting with the members) agreed that Bro. Helgerson would assume all the pulpit responsibilities. He was still relatively young in the faith and full of ideas he was getting from secular and historical sources. (I hasten to add at this point that all of this information is common knowledge and uncontested among the brethren in the area. I include Kelly DeVoll's contact information below; feel free to contact him for a closer perspective.)

Bro. Helgerson preached at Lakewoods Drive for about six years. Multiple sources — including my parents, other brethren in the area, and all of the brethren at Lakewoods Drive — characterize his preaching as high in tone, "professorial," full of large words and complex concepts, almost completely lacking in practical application, and beyond the understanding of a substantial number of members. He was asked repeatedly to consider his approach, but he resisted all efforts to change. Ultimately the members formed a committee of three men to give him feedback on his preaching with a view to making it

more “listener-friendly.” Quickly after that (last fall), Bro. Helgerson resigned his position. The church agreed to keep him on until August 2020 so he could transition into another preaching position or a job as a lecturer at a university or school of theology.

At that point an even more disturbing trend was emerging — a tendency to dismiss Biblical authority, especially relating to the examples of the apostles. After the plan was put in motion for him to leave, this trend intensified. Many of the brethren, as you would expect, objected to this teaching both publicly and privately. But a plan was already in place for him to leave. Additionally, there was an element present that, like Bro. Helgerson, wanted to break free of the “legalistic” and “outmoded” reliance on commands, examples and necessary inferences that had characterized churches of Christ over the years.

I was contacted by several of the members during this process and asked if I would consider joining the work. For a variety of reasons, both personal and spiritual, I was inclined to listen. I visited with the group over the Christmas holidays, but by that point there was a movement stirring to get Bro. Helgerson to stay. Obviously they were not in position to make an offer at that time, and I would not have accepted it if they had. Succeeding weeks saw the friction and tension ratchet up considerably.

Finally, as I mentioned in my previous letter, the factious element showed their hand, expressing the desire to start a new, “non-denominational” work. This was rejected, and the brethren unanimously voted to ask Bro. Helgerson to leave immediately. He did so with what I was told was a remarkable and commendable lack of hostility and resentment.

The two families at the center — those of the former elder and the preacher — were the only ones who left. Some of those who remain have more in common philosophically with Bro. Helgerson than others; however, all of them are united in an effort to build up one another and do the work of the Lord in Georgetown. My position on related matters is a matter of public knowledge. I have discussed these points with several of the men, and they have unanimously agreed to offer me the opportunity.

There is work to do, certainly. But I firmly believe that — with a proper and godly application of patience, persistence and love — the work in Georgetown can proceed and thrive. In fact, given the large number of visitors and the number of brethren in the immediate area who deliberately avoided Lakewoods Drive in the past because of doctrinal concerns, there is every reason to expect quick numerical and financial growth. I expect to be turning back a sizeable amount of outside support by the end of 2020. Of course, only God knows the future. All we can do is plant and water, trusting Him to give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:7).

I hope this letter answers whatever questions you may have. Please feel free to contact me or Bro. DeVoll (phone number included below) if you have any further concerns. And whether or not you agree to participate in the work, you have our prayers for the progress of the gospel in Pasadena as we request yours.

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Kelly DeVoll
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From the desk of

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February 24, 2020
Pensacola, Florida

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To the elders of the Cy-Fair church of Christ in Cypress, Texas. Greetings in the Lord.

I am writing to inform you of an exciting opportunity for the Hammons family. I have been asked to join the Lakehills Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas. But after recent reverses (which are absolutely blessings in disguise), they are unable to provide full support.

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To the brethren at Lakewoods Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas— greetings in the Lord.



To the brethren at Lakewoods Drive church of Christ in Georgetown, Texas — greetings in the Lord.

I thank you again for the wonderful day we were able to spend together in fellowship last month. It is always a joy to find brethren walking in the truth, both old friends and new acquaintances. My family continues to keep you all in our prayers.

I was glad to receive a note from Jarrod Drawbaugh a few days ago in which he expressed his view of where the church was heading, both locally and more broadly. Particularly he posed two questions and indicated he would share the answers, as well as the original letter, with the group there. I agree that this approach will go a long way to helping us understand one another in our efforts to pursue “the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3). Therefore I am providing my answers here; while I am at it, I will also share my thoughts regarding some issues that seem to me to speak to the issues at hand. I hope and trust you will read carefully, prayerfully and kindly, always (as earlier generations were wont to say) measuring them by the word of God.



The questions Jarrod posed were:

1. With the old adage of "in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity" in mind, what do you believe are the essentials of the Christian faith?
2. What are your thoughts/how would you go about evangelism to spread the gospel, convert lost souls, and grow the church?

I ask for your patience and longsuffering, as I have a great deal to say about both of these topics and I want to do both questions justice. I will deal with the second question first:

Evangelism

I believe the church in Georgetown is in a remarkable position for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is one of the main reasons I was drawn to it. You are in position, by God’s grace, to engage in numerous efforts to reach, convert and instruct the lost. I will detail a few ideas here.

Some of these approaches are more direct than others. Some are more “modern” than others. But I think you will find that everyone in the church will find an area in which they can contribute, from grade-schoolers to the homebound.

Quarterly topical studies. Many of our neighbors, I believe, would be genuinely interested in what

the Bible says about current topics such as immigration, climate change, dinosaurs, end-time theories, and the like. If the church announced such a study — perhaps even do it at a private home and provide refreshments — we might be surprised at the doors it could open.

MOPS and other women’s groups. “Mothers of preschoolers” could invite their friends for a light Bible study to take place after the children get dropped off. Instead of mani-pedis, we could get them to focus on Jesus for an hour or so.

Social media. I have endeavored to create a larger presence on Facebook, YouTube and other platforms in recent years. It is the easiest thing in the world to share a Facebook post, provide a link to a video, or invite friends to “have a look/listen” to what is going on with the local church. Currently I post weekly “Facebook Live” posts on Friday mornings, helping my listeners read their way through the Bible in a single year. I host a weekly podcast, “Citizen of Heaven,” that drops every Tuesday morning in audio and video formats. The church can post links to such things on its own Facebook page, along with other information. But it is far more effective if individual members share the information, and do so with a notable enthusiasm — i.e., *“I wish all my friends would take 10 minutes to listen to this. If you’ve struggled understanding Revelation, I think this will really open your eyes!”*

Business cards. I leave copies of my business card out in the foyer, both for members and for visitors. I drop them where I do business and encourage the members to do the same. If a local coffee house or auto mechanic is willing to take a stack of them, I leave a stack of them. It is an easy and nonintrusive way to “get my name out there in the community.” I plan to design new ones that feature links to the podcast and perhaps other relevant information. And this does not have to be just for preachers; they could be printed for any member who will use them. They would be especially appropriate for drawing attention to more informal studies that might take place outside of regular “meet at the church house” gatherings. Speaking of which ...

Meet-up. Georgetown seems to be an ideal environment for Meet-up. Many preachers have taken advantage of this app to set up studies at Chick Fil-A, Starbucks (if the manager is willing), Waffle House, or some other easy-to-find gathering place. I am a bit of a fanatic about Bible-reading; a regular gathering to encourage regular Bible-reading habits would be a perfect hook. *“Georgetown Christians are meeting at 7 a.m. at Chick Fil-A for our weekly Bible reading nudge. This week we’re reading Numbers. Read the book ahead of time, or just drop in!”*

Accountability cards. Jarrod mentioned getting together weekly and discussing everyone’s evangelism efforts. This would be in that same vein. The church could supply cards for every member, with blanks for Bible discussions, invitations extended, and other efforts being made to share the gospel. Whether the members share the information in a big meeting, hold one another accountable person-to-person, or just try to be honest with themselves, it should motivate everyone to do better.

Branding. I have become an advocate of tying all of the efforts of the church into a single theme, represented by a “trademark” of sorts. The man who is currently redesigning my personal website — a brother in Christ in Missouri — does this sort of work for churches all the time. He assures me that a brand can be developed with relative ease and incorporated into every aspect of the church’s work — display signs, letterhead, invitations, advertising, billboards, handouts, PowerPoint slides, you name it. I am including a logo of my own design promoting an appropriate theme. A logo like this could be modified to fit whatever circumstance might arise. For the singing on the square, for instance, the invitations and programs would include the “Praising” logo; the quarterly topical studies would be announced with the

“Learning” logo; meetings for teaching young men how to present sermons, seminars on godly marriages, and similar meetings would carry the “Training” logo. This would provide an easy way for the church to self-check. If what the church is trying to do does not fit within the parameters of what the church is striving to be, that effort should be scrapped. It helps the church define itself both for its own benefit and for that of the community. Color choice is paramount, by the way. Harsh colors such as red, yellow and orange have a distinctly negative effect on the passer-by. Blues and greens are far more welcoming.

As you can tell, I have given this topic a great deal of thought over the years. If the church in Georgetown has a genuine interest in reaching the lost in the community, I sincerely believe I and my family can help.

Essentials

The question of which spiritual matters are more important than others, needless to say, is a complicated matter. We would all agree that some matters that involve our walk with Christ are matters of judgment and others are matters of doctrine. Distinguishing the one from the other is often complicated. A proper treatment of this topic would take months of preaching, but here is my best effort to cover the question in minimal space.

In a nutshell, Jesus answers the question in Matthew 22:37-40. Love God. Love your neighbor. God’s will for mankind has always been summed up in these principles.

If we love God (and by extension, Jesus), we will keep His commandments (1 John 5:3). We will seek His preferences instead of our own — “trying to learn what is pleasing to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:3). We will willingly and humbly submit to His grooming process, waiting for His exaltation in His way and His time (James 4:10). We will delight in His grace and refuse to use it as an excuse for further sin (Romans 6:1-2), but rather continue to “walk in the Light as He Himself is in the light” (1 John 1:7) while we confess our ongoing need for mercy and forgiveness (1 John 1:9).

If we love our neighbors, we will treat them with kindness and respect. Sinful and/or nauseating behavior is no loophole; no one created in the image of God should be subjected to ridicule, violence or hatred. Love compels us to act responsibly and honestly at all times, regardless of how much responsibility and honesty we meet coming back. It is part and parcel with turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:39). We do not delight in ill treatment from sinners, but we accept it as part of our walk with Christ (Matthew 5:10-11) and rejoice that our “thorn in the flesh” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10) gives us an opportunity to lean on the Lord just a little bit more.

I suspect we would all agree on these general points. No one who respects God’s word could do otherwise. But conflict does arise in the body of Christ; we have seen it in our own lifetimes, and we see it in the pages of the New Testament. So how do we apply principles of love in times of diversity, conflict and out-and-out warfare? We can do one of two things: **we can develop a philosophy of our own that suits us; or we can listen to the word of God.** If you believe in our own flawed nature (Jeremiah 19:23) and the all-sufficiency of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17), the choice is clear. But we must have a mind to truly submit to God’s word, whatever it says and however it says it. Only the Spirit-led one will find God’s truth; the “natural man,” the one still guided by his own impulses, will inevitably fall short (1 Corinthians 2:6-16).

Jesus promised that “all the truth” would be left with His apostles (John 16:13). That is precisely

what happened in the First Century (Jude 3). The foundation left by apostles and prophets, with Jesus being at the corner of it (Ephesians 2:19-20), is where we must build; Jesus Himself warned of those — some of whom would claim to be His followers — who would try to build elsewhere (Matthew 7:21-27).

Since the apostles were at the epicenter of God's communication with His church, it is critical that we see what constituted a *casus belli* in their own minds. And inevitably it comes back to one version or another of the same principle: **a rejection of apostolic authority**.

The apostle Paul was the one who initially taught the truth to the Galatians. Not long afterward, others came in with a different gospel — one, by the way, that (as far as we can tell) upheld principles such as baptism for remission of sins, weekly partaking of the Lord's Supper, abstention from immorality of all sorts, and salvation by grace. And Paul placed a curse on the teachers of that gospel and any who would submit to it (Galatians 1:8-9), saying those who had accepted it instead of the pure gospel Paul had preached had "fallen from grace" (Galatians 5:4).

The apostle John extended fellowship with himself, the other apostles, Jesus Christ and God the Father to his readers (1 John 1:1-4). Those who rejected fellowship with John — that is, rejected his words — could not have that fellowship (2 John 9). He delighted in those who were found "walking in the truth" (3 John 4), and he condemned self-serving egotists who stood between God's people and the only source of truth God had provided (3 John 9-10).

The apostle Peter wrote, "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (2 Peter 1:3). That knowledge, he said, was given to him and the other apostles in full, and that his readers would "do well to pay attention" to it (2 Peter 1:19). He said that false teachers would arise in the church and cause souls to be lost (2 Peter 2:1-3), teachers and students alike. The cure was as it ever had been — "that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of our Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles" (2 Peter 3:1-2).

Simply put, **the apostles would have no truck with those who rejected their words, either in part or in whole. And they urged their readers to do the same, saying repeatedly that their souls depended on their compliance.**

Well, we may say, surely not every jot and tittle of Scripture is worth going to war. And that is true. Over and over, the apostles urge us to pursue "the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Ephesians 4:3). Ephesians 4:32 reads, "Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." Love, Peter tells us, "covers a multitude of sins" (1 Peter 4:8). None of us is perfect; God will be the judge of us all. Certainly we should have the love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7).

That said, conflicts still arose. And some had to be handled directly — even at the expense of a brother or sister in Christ. Again, following the apostles' lead can help us know how to "judge with righteous judgment" (John 7:24).

Conflict was necessary over **matters pertaining to congregational worship**. Paul's first letter to Corinth makes clear his issues with the brethren and their handling of the Lord's Day, particularly the Supper (1 Corinthians 11:17-21). Those who partook in an unworthy manner were "guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:27). Similar requirements are made regarding the exercise of spiritual gifts. Edification was the premium, not self-aggrandizement (1 Corinthians 11:26). Women were not to exercise their gifts at all (1 Corinthians 14:34). Those who were truly moved by the Spirit would attest that Paul taught the truth and that no other habit should be tolerated (1 Corinthians 14:37-38).