



Elders and Deacons

We are a few days from the deadline to nominate men in our congregation for elder and deacon. I want to share a few more thoughts about elders and deacons.

- Both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly use the metaphor of "shepherding" to describe the spiritual leadership of God's people. The New Testament also views elders as shepherds (e.g., Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:1-4). The elders' mission is to lead, teach, protect, and love their church members as shepherds care for the sheep in a flock.
- The qualifications of elders and deacons are remarkably similar. This is no accident. Godliness matters, and it begins at home. It appears the chief difference is in the capacity to teach. The role of deacon is less specified, which leads me to conclude that deacons can play various roles as the congregation needs. While not described as deacons, Acts chapter 6 describes a set of men that appear to serve in roles consistent with that of a deacon.
- We always find elders (plural) in New Testament churches (e.g., Acts 15:4; 20:17; Titus 1:5). Each congregation should have a team of shepherds. The longer I serve, the more I see value in this model.
- Elders have a measure of authority over the local church. That's why the New Testament also calls them "overseers." The elders' authority is not unquestionable, nor should it be exercised domineeringly. The more I study deaconship, the more I view them as servant leaders encouraging others to serve with them.

- Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and elders are merely his temporary helpers (1 Peter 5:4). At their best, elders and deacons model Jesus' character. Good elders and deacons never lose that awareness that they are still sheep, utterly fallible, dependent on the grace of the Good Shepherd.

- Keith Coble