

# Coach's Corner

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## “The Ministry Of Elders”

In the first six issues which we devoted to discussion of eldership we have discussed what an elder is, the qualifications of elders, the reality that eldership is not only a skill-based, but also very much a character-based ministry. What we have not covered yet is the question, “What are elders supposed to do?” In this issue we take up that question and provide an answer from the New Testament.

### *The Priority: Prayer And The Word*

In 1 Peter 5:1-2 the Apostle Peter exhorts pastors to shepherd the flock of God and he writes that he does this “as a fellow elder”. This suggests that though the apostles had special authority from the Lord Jesus Christ which superseded elders (cf. 1 Cor. 9:1; Eph. 2:20; 2 Peter 3:2), what they did in their ministries very likely formed a pattern for how elders were to function. This understanding is important since we read in Acts 6:1-6 that the apostles appointed deacons to compassion ministry needs among the church so that they could devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.” (v. 4) This does not mean that that apostles or elders could not be involved in addressing the physical needs of others at all (see Acts 20:35; Gal. 2:10; Rom. 15:25; James 1:27). It does mean that saints other than elders should have primary oversight of such ministry so that the latter can give their attention chiefly to prayer and word ministries.

Elders, then, should not only be men of prayer and the word, they should also give oversight (cf. 1 Tim. 3:4-5) to the church in such a manner that the body of Christ is a praying people who also are taking in and living out God’s word. The ministry of the word covers everything from preaching (1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 2 Tim. 4:2) to discipling, counseling, teaching, and helping to refute false doctrine (Eph. 4:12ff.; Col. 1:28; 2 Tim. 2:2; Titus 1:9-10). Bottom-line, elders are the chief leaders in the congregation who give direction to the congregation for spiritual growth and the carrying out of our God-given mission through word ministry and prayer.

### *Shepherding*

As we have already seen, Peter exhorts elders to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you” (1 Peter 5:2). Part of what this involves is included in the next clause, “exercising oversight”. In other words, the elders have the responsibility of overseeing the overall ministry of the Church (see also 1 Tim. 5:17a). They give leadership to the overall ministries of the Church to make sure that things are functioning well, that saints are growing (Heb. 13:17), that evangelism and discipling are taking place (cf. Mt. 28:19-20; 2 Tim. 4:5), and that the church is coming together in maturity and unity (Eph. 4:12-16).

Such shepherding most likely includes elders giving personal attention to saints—especially those who are hurting in some way (see Gal. 2:10; Heb. 10:34; James 1:27). However, how elders give such attention must be understood in light of the next area of ministry.

*Discipleship and Delegation*

Following the example that Moses set in Exodus 18 (at the counsel of his father-in-law), we have already seen that the apostles delegated responsibilities to others so that they could focus on the primary aspects of their ministry (Acts 6:1-6). Part of what this means is that elders must give much attention to raising up and training an “army” of ministers who can be involved in the work of the ministry (Eph. 4:12-16; 2 Tim. 2:2)—all filling the niche which God has created for them and their spiritual gifts (1 Corinthians 12).

In large part, what this means is that elders should always have the mentality that on the one hand I am one of the ministers in our congregation with a responsibility to serve in my area of ministry, yet on the other hand, it is not my responsibility to do all the ministry. We are called to pray, work, lead, teach, and train toward the goal that the saints will do the work of the ministry together.

Men, as you can easily see, this ministry of eldership is a glorious, important, and rewarding ministry. Thank you for all you are doing to lead our wonderful congregation!

Joyfully pastoring and overseeing the flock with you,

Tom