The Role & Responsibilities of the Saints

A Structured Household: Elders, Deacons, with the Saints / Multiple Passages / November 15, 2026

Introduction:

Today, we come to the final sermon in our series, "A Structured Household," on God's design for leadership in the church. We've seen God's promises to provide shepherd-leaders and how the roles of elders and deacons serve the shepherding care of Christ's church. Each role has distinct responsibilities and function in harmony. This morning, we'll consider the role and responsibility of the saints because God's design for a structured household includes every member of the household. Before diving in, let's remember two things. First, church leadership is not about gaining status or authority but going deeper in sacrifice and service. As Jesus told the apostles, "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all." Second, notice how Paul addressed the saints, "with the overseers and deacons" in Philippians 1:1. Deacons and elders aren't exempt from the responsibilities of the saints. Rather, they are among the saints and called to lead in fulfilling the responsibilities. We'll consider these responsibilities through four words: participating, sharpening, following, and discerning. First, all saints should be,

Actively Participating

Scripture consistently encourages active participation in God's covenant community. Look at Acts 2:42-46, "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers…And all who believed were together and had all things in common…selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts." Notice the depth of participation. They had a devotion to receiving instruction and joyful fellowship, daily breaking bread, praying together, worshipping together, and radically caring for each other's needs. Christ's people shape their identity around Him and His Kingdom. Look at Hebrews 10:24-25. After speaking of our assurance to draw near to God because of Jesus' sacrifice, we read, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another." Rather than neglecting to meet together, we should set our hearts on active engagement and encouragement. Gathering isn't something to fit into busy schedules, it is the foundation of our lives. Turn to Ephesians 4 to see why. In verses 1-6, Paul urges us to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel, pursuing peace and unity because we are one body. Then, in verse 7, he moves to Christ giving spiritual gifts to each of us. And look at verses 11-12, "[Christ] gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ." Note the purpose of certain gifts Christ gave, "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." Move down to verse 15-16, where Paul says, "we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love." Do you see what Paul is saying? Our growth is contingent on all the saints being equipped and working properly in ministry. Talking about Spiritual Gifts, 1 Corinthians 12:7 says, "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." Likewise, Romans 12:6, "Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them." And 1 Peter 4:10, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace." Every member of the body has been given spiritual gifts to be used within the body of Christ to build it up in love. Family, church is not a spectator sport. When people are stagnant, growth is stunted. Before considering the next word, let's ask a question.

1) How Should We Adjust Our Participation in Church Life?

Our way of life in the church should involve more than simply attending a worship gathering to receive what we need for the week. It should be a mind and heart dedication to pursuing the Lord together and consideration of how to spur others on in faith. Are we asking how much we can participate?

Or what's the minimal I have to give? When we gather, do we consider how to encourage others in their faith? Paul says when each person of the body is equipped and working properly, the body is built up in love. We should be actively participating, frequently gathering together and serving each other. Consider the second word, all saints should be,

Lovingly Sharpening

Every believer is meant to sharpen other believers. Look at Philippians 1:27. Paul says, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that," I may hear you are, "striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." Living in a manner worthy of the gospel means striving alongside others for the faith. Look at Hebrews 3:12-13, "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called 'today,' that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." The way we fight an evil, unbelieving heart is through mutual daily exhortation. The word for exhort comes from the same root word often used for the Spirit, meaning "to call to one's side" and carrying the ideas of encouragement and appeal. 1 Thessalonians 5:14 tells us, "Admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all." Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom." God calls us to help each other fight the fight of faith. But how we sharpen one another matters. Look at 1 Corinthians 13:3–7. We often only think of this primarily in relation to marriage, but it comes in Paul's instructions for the gathered church. After mentioning the fruitless use of spiritual gifts without love, he says, "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." Note Paul's flow. He says even the greatest sacrifices for Jesus gain nothing if love for the body is not flowing through it before describing a love marked by patience and kindness, lacking envy and selfishness, and committed to truth over wrongdoing. This, he says, is a love that bears with others, gives the benefit of hope instead of assuming the worst, hopes for transformation, and perseveres in seeking others good. This must be the undertone of how we sharpen one another. We speak the truth in love. We don't exhort and admonish to tear people down but build them up in love. So, let's ask,

2) How Are We Sharpening Others?

If we gather only to receive, we won't be sharpening each other. Do we have concern for the faith of those around us? Are we pursuing genuine relationships with the body of Christ? I'm not talking about being friendly on Sundays but really walking through life together. When we spur others on in the faith, are we harsh in our approach even if it is the truth? Are we patient with the idle, fainthearted, and weak? Is our motive for their good, or our convenience? We should be lovingly sharpening, concerned about the faith of others and loving in our exhortation. Consider the third word, all saints should be,

Humbly Following

If we're honest, we struggle to following leaders in part because of pride. However, the Scripture calls the saints to humbly follow leaders. Look at Hebrews 13:7, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." We are called to follow the examples of elders and deacons. Not to just admire their faith but imitate it. We might be comfortable with this, but look at Hebrews 13:17, ten verses later, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account." Wait a second. I can imitate faith, but am I really called to obey and submit to those who lead? Paul says in 1 Corinthians 16:15–16, "I urge you, brothers—you know that the household of Stephanas…have devoted themselves to the service of the saints— be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer." Peter says in 1 Peter 5:5, "you who are younger, be subject to the elders." Scripture doesn't hesitate to call us to submit to leaders. Now, don't jump straight to the exceptions. We'll get to those but sit with the command first.

Consider what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, “respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work.” And in 1 Timothy 5:17, he says, “Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” Those who faithful devote their lives to leadership in Christ’s body, truly going deeper in sacrifice and service should be honored, respected, esteemed and yes, even obeyed. Why? Note the fruit. 1 Thessalonians 5:13 shows it entreats peace. Hebrews 13:17 says it helps leaders watch over God’s people joyfully. Here’s the question we can ask,

3) Are We Bringing Joy or Groaning to Our Leaders?

There is a way to live within God’s household as a burden to leaders, and a way to live that brings joy to them. Are you constantly skeptical of their decisions? Do you ask how you can humbly follow their lead? Can you trust they are seeking the good of the whole church, even if it doesn’t seem good for you? Do you honor all who devote themselves to service of the saints? Before moving on, consider the key to this. Look again at 1 Peter 5:5, “Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’” Note how everyone is called to be clothed in humility. If we have humility and the mutual submission Ephesians 5:21 calls for, where the saints humbly follow leaders who submit and sacrifice their desires for the good of the church, we will shine for Christ. We should be humbly following, seeking to honor, respect, esteem, and submit to those who lead well. Now, before we misunderstand this, consider the final word. All saints should be,

Prayerfully Discerning

The call to obey and submit to leaders doesn’t mean blindly following them. Nor does it mean the saints have no role in decisions. There are three things to consider. First, we don’t follow leaders who steer us away from God’s precepts. Look at Acts 4:19-20. When confronted by Israel’s leaders and called to deny the truth of the gospel, the apostles respond, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.’” In a similar situation in Acts 5, they emphatically say, “We must obey God rather than men.” Let’s be careful here, though, because our pride can sneak in and say, “Well, that means I don’t have to follow if it is not directly in Scripture.” Some decisions don’t have direct Scriptural guidance and are matters of wisdom and prudence. In these, God often uses the collective wisdom of leaders to guide the church. You may be called to follow leadership in those wisdom decisions. The key is not violating God’s precepts. We also can’t say, “Well, they’re not doing it, so why should I?” In Matthew 23:2-3, Jesus says, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses’ seat, so do and observe whatever they tell you, but not the works they do. For they preach, but do not practice.” Leaders may call for the right thing but fail to practice it themselves. Don’t let negligence hinder obedience. Next, we should understand the saints have a role in some decisions. Look at Acts 11:27-30, When the church in Antioch heard of the famine coming, they collectively determined to send relief. The context of Acts 13:1-3 suggest the whole church was involved in commissioning Barnabas and Saul. Notice what Luke says in Acts 15:22. After the apostles and elders teach on the decisions surrounding Gentile inclusion into God’s new covenant people, Luke records, “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.” Consider the final step of church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17. When repentance doesn’t come after individual and group efforts, Jesus says, “tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.” The church holds the final authority in church discipline. We see this confirmed in 1 Corinthians 5:4-5 when Paul says, “When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus… you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.” Scripture shows the church involved in crucial decisions around the use of funds, commissioning leaders, and exercising church discipline. Proverbs 11:14 says, “Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors there is safety.” This doesn’t mean the church should be involved in every decision.

Some aren't appropriate to place on the shoulders of the sheep and simply require trust in the leader's wisdom. But others need input from the body. Finally, we should understand the church has a responsibility to address persistent sin of elders. This isn't in your bulletin but turn to 1 Timothy 5. In verse 19, Paul says, "Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses." We often think of this only as guarding against frivolous charges, which it does. But consider the next verse, "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear." This shows charges should be brought and addressed when there are multiple witnesses. And if a leader persists in sin, they are publicly rebuked. All of this shows the saints have responsibilities of helping their leaders keep the church focused on Christ and His kingdom. So, let's as our final question,

4) Are We Prayerfully Discerning What Our Leaders Put Before Us?

We tend to lean one way, either blindly following leaders or stubbornly resisting leadership. Scripture calls us to a middle ground. Are you discerning truth from error? Do you participate when input is sought? Let me get a little more pointed. Are you helping discern who is in and put forward for leadership? Do you share concerns if you believe they're unqualified? I've had some exit leadership only to hear, "you know I voted against them." I've also received comments about past sins that leaders may not have been addressed. In both instances, I'm left wondering why nothing was shared. Or maybe it was, but through gossip. Now, let me say two things. First, we must discern between moments of sin that need correction and persistent sin. Repentance from moments of sin doesn't disqualify someone. Look at Peter's denial of Christ or Paul rebuking him for his treatment of Gentiles in Galatians 2. The issue is persistent sin. Second, if charges were faithfully brought and not addressed. Or addressed but leaders were allowed to persist in sin, we have failed you. Forgive us and bring that to our attention so we can move forward appropriately. Family, we should be prayerfully discerning in our following, helping provide wisdom in decision making and addressing concerns if needed.

Conclusion:

As the worship team comes for our time of response, have God to shape your heart around His design in the role of the saints. Considering these things, what is God calling you to believe, desire, or do? Ask the Spirit to search your heart for ways you need to repent or grow. Remember, Christ walked among us, died in our place, and rose victorious for a purpose. To give us power over Satan, sin, and death. He made us His covenant people to live on mission together. Let these things call your heart to press into His mission. Lean into these responsibilities and see what God will do through you. Let's pray as we prepare to respond.