

*Duty to the World*  
#5 in “PRAXIS: Disciplines of Faith and Action”  
2 Timothy 1.1-14  
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### Introduction to the Morning Lesson

The Bible says, “We are saved by grace through faith, not by works.”<sup>1</sup> The Bible also says, “Faith without works is dead.”<sup>2</sup> Christians have argued from the beginning about which of these is most important. The word *praxis* tries to hold both together. What we believe and what we do are equally important. In this series we have talked about our praxis in terms of attitudes, money, prayer, and our duty to the church. Today on this World Communion Sunday we’ll conclude by talking about our duty to the world.

My text comes from 2 Timothy 1 where the story of Paul’s relationship to Timothy offers some very specific guidance for Christian praxis on behalf of the world. Let’s read it in 2 Timothy 1.

### 2 Timothy 1.1-14 (NRSV)

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my beloved child:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am grateful to God — whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did — when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher, and for this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him. Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love

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<sup>1</sup> Ephesians 2.8-9: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

<sup>2</sup> James 2.26: “For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead.”

that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.

## Introduction

Of course, no single human being can really think about the whole world, let alone serve the whole world, let alone love it. The *whole* world is truly beyond anyone's grasp. Yet Christians are frequently urged to be conscious of the world and there is no better time to do so than World Communion Sunday. Begun 67 years ago<sup>3</sup> in the Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, World Communion Sunday now literally spans the globe. So even if we cannot grasp the whole world, we can on this Sunday at least ponder what it means for the fellowship of Christians to span all distances, all colors, all creeds, all nationalities, all political systems, all the divisions which so separate the human family. Humanity may be divided but there is or at least there should be unity in Jesus Christ.

But if we believe that Jesus Christ is the one hope for the whole world, how do we live so that this becomes a reality? How do we influence for Jesus Christ that part of the world we touch? What is our duty to the world? Three things that were urged upon Timothy can help us answer that question. The text said, "God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline." That's our duty to the world: to live in a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

## ONE: Our duty of power

First, think of our duty of power. Our duty of power is not to exercise great power but rather to celebrate and live by a different kind of power. A writer named William Carl tells about meeting with a group of military personnel not long after the end of World War II. They met in Berchtesgaden, West Germany. There were officers and enlisted men from all over Western Europe. On the last night of their retreat, those who cared to gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper. They were meeting in the same hotel where during the war the German high command met with Adolf Hitler to plan the Third Reich's strategy of destruction. Outside the window, the Alps stood as silent sentinels, reaching up into the twilight. Mr. Carl says it was an electric moment when he realized the significance. Two words — "Heil Hitler!" — once echoed through those halls and bounced off those mountain peaks. Two words that bloodied the face of Europe and caused unspeakable suffering. But those words were heard no longer. They were replaced by other words that night — older words, words with even deeper power: "This do in remembrance of me."<sup>4</sup>

We will hear these words again this morning, these older words of a deeper and greater power: "This do in remembrance of me." These words speak not the power of glory but the power of sacrifice, the power of giving our lives even as Christ gave his life for us. Living by these words is our duty of power.

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<sup>3</sup> October 4, 1936.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted from *Doran's*, 1986, 310.

**TWO: Our duty of love**

We also have a duty of love. What does it mean to love the world? At the very least it means to touch others in ways that heal and help. One writer came up with a series of questions which he called the “touch test” for Christian love.

- When touched by another’s suffering, do we weep?
- When touched by another’s joy, do we laugh?
- When touched by another’s pain, do we ache?
- When touched by another’s warmth, are we comforted?
- When touched by another’s coldness, are we chilled?
- When touched by another’s sorrow, do we mourn?
- When touched by another’s love, do we multiply that love and send it on?<sup>5</sup>

In other words, does God want us to believe the right things? Yes! Does God want us to do the right things? Yes! But the test of believing and doing is love.

God calls us to be people who live in the power of love. Love is not a power which breaks apart but a power that unites. It is a power that suffers just as Jesus suffered. But this is our duty to the world — “suffering for the gospel” — for that is the power of God’s love.

**THREE: Our duty of self-discipline**

We have a duty of power. We have a duty of love. And finally we have a duty of self-discipline. I read recently of an interesting problem encountered when they built one of the great bridges over the East River in New York City. The engineers discovered an old, sunken ship embedded in the river mud, just where one of the central piers of the bridge needed to go down to its bedrock foundation. No tugboat was able to pull the wreck from the ooze of the river bottom. It simply would not budge no matter what force was applied.

Finally, one of the workers hit upon this scheme. A large flatboat, which had been used to bring stone down the river, was moved into position and chained to the old sunken ship when the tide was very low. Then they simply waited for the great tidal energies to do their work. With all the force of the ocean behind it and the moon above it, the rising tide lifted the flatboat inch by inch. As it rose up, lifted by irresistible power, the wreckage came up with it, pulled free from the mud. Then it was towed out to deep ocean, unchained, and dropped forever out of the way.<sup>6</sup>

Self-discipline may be simply putting ourselves in position where the tides of God’s Spirit can raise us up and let us do useful things. To be self-disciplined as a Christian is not to rely on our own strength. When we put ourselves in a position where God’s strength can work through us, amazing things can happen. That’s our duty of self-discipline.

**Conclusion**

It is said that a well known Broadway playwright was once searching through the New

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<sup>5</sup> Stan Purdum, ed., “Stay in Touch,” *Homiletics* 10.5 (1998): 35.

<sup>6</sup> From *Doran’s*, 1986, 308.

York City telephone book to find the number of the person he was trying to reach. All of sudden he was struck by the page after page of names, thousands upon countless thousands of names and he exclaimed, “Not much plot to this book but what a cast!”

What a cast, indeed. Multiply the Manhattan telephone book by hundreds and thousands and then you really have a cast: the whole human family in all its glory and tragedy. What a cast. But what’s the story? What’s the plot?

It’s our duty to the world we touch to help write that story in the name of Jesus Christ. We can do that only as we let the spirit of power and love and self-discipline become the living center in our lives. This is our Christian praxis to which we are called by God through Jesus Christ our Lord.