

Yet I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed.  
2 Tim 1.12.

Ever since Prof Sir Richard Doll proved the connection between smoking and lung cancer and heart disease in the 1950s the authorities have been nagging us to quit smoking. (I speak as a reformed smoker!) We have had health education programmes pleading with us to give up our deadly habit. Cigarette packets now have the simple slogan, 'Smoking Kills'. Then they discovered 'passive smoking' and that led them to pass laws banning smoking in public places. And finally, we are compelled to put up No Smoking signs all over our churches and public buildings. I just wish that they authorities were as hysterically concerned about the very evils of alcohol, drug, and gambling abuse. Our leaders have worked tirelessly to ban smoking, because they want to save us from the evil consequences of this vile habit. Education clearly didn't work; the only thing left is to ban it. It's for our own good!

The anti-smoker campaigners are trying to help us; to warn us of the consequences of smoking. And that's exactly what St Paul is doing. He is desperately anxious to warn people of the consequences of their sin and of their rejection of him. He knows that there is a God who is *holy*, and sin *angers* him. He will see justice done. This is a moral universe where there are consequences to actions and our deepest need is for justice. Like the anti-smokers, St Paul is warning us about danger ahead: God will punish us unless we get right with him. 'Being saved' is not old-fashioned, but the heart of the gospel. 'Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners' says Paul in 1 Tim 1.15. See also 2 Tim 1.9...

Ah, but we're not *sinners*. We're not Hitler, or paedophiles, are we? No, compared to *them* we're not, but judged by *God's* absolute justice we are. Would you like your mother to see a videotape of your *whole* life? every little bit? And we have a warped notion of justice. I want justice for the drunk driver who killed my child, but I get angry when the police breathalyse *me*. And GB has a serious crisis in justice when criminals have more rights than victims. The great mass of our population who never give a thought to God, are kidding themselves that God isn't after them too. Like the smoker who thinks he isn't damaging his health, they are in denial. More than that: they are *angry* when told they are sinners who need to repent and get right with God.

And so what happens? Non-Christians fight back. Look at v8, and you will see the two ideas of 'being *ashamed* of the gospel' and '*suffering* for the gospel'... There is huge pressure put on Christians to soft-pedal the idea of human sinfulness and our need of God's rescue of us. Hell? No, we've outgrown that grotesque and primitive idea. Sophisticated people don't use that sort of language now. Only bigoted, not very bright fundamentalists speak like that now. Can you see how we are being made to feel *ashamed* of the gospel? So what do you make of Jn3.16, 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not *perish* but have everlasting life'? It's a pretty text about God loving us and giving us Jesus; it's harmless, isn't it? It doesn't matter whether you believe in Jesus or not, because we're all going to heaven, aren't we? Well, I'm afraid that

that is *not* what it says. No matter how hard you try to be a good person, you will never come up to God's standard, but he has graciously opened up a way. Put your trust in Jesus who took your punishment on the Cross, and you will be saved, vv9-10... Preachers fail to understand God's *holiness* if they imagine that God isn't bothered whether you accept him or not, or live his way or not. *Jn3.16* speaks of people who don't believe in Jesus as *perishing*. God is the King and Lord, and he *will* be obeyed. He isn't being a spoilt brat. It's only when everyone obeys him that the world will finally have justice and peace. Don't let anyone make you ashamed of that.

But more than making Christians feel stupid for believing the Bible, people will make you *suffer* for it. We're used, unfortunately, to hearing about our Christians brothers and sisters suffering for Christ in faraway countries, but it's happening here in our own land now. Why is this? It's because there are many in GB with a very definite anti-christian agenda. Basically, they don't want the lordship of Christ in their lives. They want to be free to do whatever they please, and not have to answer to anyone for their behaviour. The struggle really *is* about the ancient claim, 'Jesus is Lord'.

The anti-smoking brigade are desperately trying to save us from our wicked smoking habit. St Paul is racing round the Mediterranean to save us from the holy God who quite rightly is going to punish us for our sinfulness and rejection of him.

But, you see, people don't like to hear this, even in our churches. That's why Timothy is buckling. So let's preach God the cuddly friend of all, and play down his justice and his

righteous anger. But be true to God's Word and people will leave you, like Phygelus and Hermogenes in v15... Be true to God's Word and you will actually *suffer* for the Gospel, v8... and v12... Our secular society hates Christ, and even within our churches they hate his Cross. Only last week a Christian magistrate was pilloried for wanting to be excused from a case involving homosexuality. Interestingly the Bp of Hulme did not support him. And then two Christian foster parents refused to be compelled by the State to promote homosexuality to the children in their care. Folks, the battle at last has been joined between the two competing ideologies of Jesus as Lord and *Man* as Lord. Choose what side you're on. As for me I put my trust in God, not in man. Like St Paul I know whom I have believed. I know God in Jesus Christ to be utterly dependable and faithful and I trust my life and future to him. Stand up for Gospel truths and don't let the secularists make you feel embarrassed by Bible teachings; stand up and be proud of Jesus, and don't let our godless society make you feel ashamed of him. We need to tell them that they're on the wrong side: Yet I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.

We don't believe in the Lord Jesus because of something we have done. Like Christ's dying to save us from our sinfulness, it's grace. It's God's gift to us. But he *chose* you and me to believe in him, so that we can go and tell others to get right with God v9... We accept that the anti-smoking brigade are warning us for our own good. We are warning others about God's judgement for their good also.