



"The jawbone of an ass is just as dangerous a weapon today as in Samson's time."

—Richard M. Nixon

24-Feb-23

Rumors Will Fly

It was late summer or perhaps early fall of 1952 in Korea. My company was dug in along the thirty-eighth parallel in a railroad bed in the area referred to as "The Iron Triangle." The Chinese controlled the high ground, living on and in Hill 1062, while we held the low ground. A minefield separated us.

A tank had been emplaced in the railroad bed several bunkers down to help silence enemy positions with its ninety-millimeter canon. One afternoon while I was talking with one of the tank crew, he told me that there was to be a division push on Hill 1062. It was to happen soon. This information was too hot to keep to myself, so I passed it on to everyone I came across.

As the grapevine did its work, the rumor finally reached division headquarters. By this time, everyone on the line had been alerted, and officers were calling back to division to ask what their orders were. To say that division was upset would be a great understatement. The higher-ups were furious, wanting to know who started the rumor. My name was the one remembered, and I was called into account for my foolishness. To this day

when rumors come to me, I try to recall the feeling when I was the one caught stupidly passing this rumor on. I wish I could say I have always been successful in halting their progress.

It matters not a bit to what organization one belongs—office, factory, team, club, or church—rumors and [gossip](#) always fly. The reasons do not vary much. To seem important is probably number one. To put down another is perhaps number two, and the third is possibly passing on information in innocence. Yet rumors, whether intentional or not, produce results. Rumors can strike fear and cause discouragement, depression, and hopelessness. In the church, they can sap the [faith](#) that [God](#) is in control and working to bring events to their proper conclusions.

A rumor can sometimes have positive results, as in the case of Jesus' healings. [Matthew 4:24](#) tells us, "Then His fame went throughout all Syria. . . ." Because of this, the people felt hope and encouragement. Perhaps many more people were able to hear His message.

More often, though, rumors produce negative effects. They are good at causing fear and hopelessness. [Matthew 24:6](#) prophesies, "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars." During World War II, rumors crisscrossed the nation, most of them false. For example, "Japan is going to attack the West Coast" was frequently heard. People also said, "Japs are vicious. Did you know they have no word for 'love' in their language?" One rumor said that East Coast beaches had closed because the bodies of Allied sailors were washing up there. When an ammunition ship blew up in Port Chicago due to the rushed, careless handling of explosives, it was said to be enemy sabotage. Gossips spoke of spies and fifth-column activities, and greatly exaggerated the enemy's might. President Franklin Roosevelt tried to thwart the fear and discouragement that such rumors produced, saying, "All we have to fear is fear itself."

Christ had many rumors spread about Him and His ministry. [Jesus](#) Himself relates one of these in [Matthew 11:18-19](#): "For John came neither eating nor drinking, and *they say*, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and *they say*, 'Look, a glutton and a winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" These rumors were designed to tear down the reputations of John and Jesus and to destroy their work.

Since the beginning, [Satan](#), the father of lies ([John 8:44](#)), has permeated the air with his spoiling and destroying attitudes. These can affect us just as it affects [the world](#) around us, causing us to want to pass on harmful rumors regarding situations and personalities. Since the breakup of the [Worldwide Church of God](#), rumors have flown about every group and many ministers, most with the intent of tearing the organization or individual down. Unfortunately, we all have probably participated in them. Even in local congregations, rumors wind their way through the brethren, casting doubts upon the activities, abilities, and reputations of fellow members.

Jesus instructs in [Matthew 12:36-37](#): "But I say to you that for every idle word man may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." God is everywhere, and He sees all that we do and hears all that we say. Yet, throughout history, mankind has said and done many things in the belief that God is somehow deaf and blind. Through Jesus' words, He wants us to understand that what we allow out of our mouths is exceedingly important. It will either help us or haunt us.

If we choose to make evil, vain, empty, thoughtless comments, God will in no way pass them over. We will all be held accountable for every careless word we speak. Why? Because our words reflect what we are. Our speech is an overflowing of our hearts: "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks" (verse 34). What we say reveals our characters.

Jesus gives us hope and wise instruction by saying, "By your words you will be justified." If we carefully consider what we say before saying it, whether in prayer, private conversation, or public speech, we can stifle the impulses of human nature and say the right thing. If, when in the midst of controversy, crisis, or adversity, we pause to consider what Jesus Himself would say in such a situation, we can begin to learn how a godly person handles difficult matters. If, when distraught, upset, or confused, we take a moment to think of the instruction of God's Word, we have the opportunity to utter [wisdom](#) instead of vanity. These episodes of spiritual growth and maturity will stand us in good stead under God's judgment. We will please God greatly.

It was a fearful and shaming experience to have to stand before a group of officers and hear that, by my passing on a rumor, the entire central front had been put on alert. It is an experience I never want to forget because it reminds me that a far greater judgment awaits me if I fail to engage the mind of God in me by His Spirit before I open my mouth to speak. If we all resolutely determine to do this, perhaps we can ground most rumors before they begin to fly.

- John O. Reid

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Gossip

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

The "fake news" of the first century was that Christians were cannibals, atheists and unpatriotic. This view was fact-based, but the facts were contextually contorted by detractors. The Romans had their own version of a media which twists facts through rumor and innuendo. Every culture is prone to interpret facts erroneously—indeed, illogically—and to pass those misshapen interpretations along through various sorts of "whisper campaigns." Today, social media provide a technically advanced conduit for character-assassination. The apostle James recognizes how the tongue, driven by carnal nature, can metaphorically start a dangerous fire. James warns everyone that gossip, tale-bearing and being a busy-body is just as damnable in God's eyes as first-degree murder. Listening to gossip is just as serious an offense as being an accessory to murder. Shockingly, we have a big chunk of the hostile world in our mouth, a potentially deadly three-inch appendage capable of slaying a six-foot human being. When we slander another human being in a whisper campaign, we are diligently performing Satan's work. The prohibition against talebearing occupies a prominent location in the Holiness Code. If we have been guilty of talebearing and gossip—as all have been, we must: 1) ask for God to forgive us, and 2) ask Him to help us present our tongues as instruments of righteousness to God, for healing and edifying, rather than destroying, people.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Purging the Rumor Bug from the Body of Christ](#)

by David F. Maas

We all know about the church grapevine. It's very good in spreading news, but it can be equally as evil when it spreads gossip and rumor. David Maas reveals how gossip harms the gossip himself.

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