

You've Got To Hear What I Heard . . .

by Kenneth G. Griswold
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Most of us knew or heard of Mr. Armstrong. Though his life was extensively chronicled, some things in his life are not well known. Many people think he was a great man, but a biography about him reveals some unsavory bits of information.

In his early teen years, he went to a school for boys—and they do not accept boys who are exceptionally good. Later in his life, he weighed an astonishing 224 pounds! He liked eating and since food was good, he would stuff himself. He had four wives. One insulted him and tried to punch him before a public appearance, so he knocked her out. On the other side of the ledger, the man did some outstanding things in his lifetime.

In Matthew 7:1 Christ said, "Judge not, that you be not judged." As God is their Judge, we should not condemn others for the things they have done. Yet, maybe what they have done is unsubstantiated—just a rumor. Rumors have ruined many people. Everyone seems to have a story or two of unfortunate occasions when someone has spread rumors about them.

We should be very skeptical about the rumors we hear. At one time my best friend and I became enemies because of rumors that were said to each of us. Solomon wrote, "He who repeats a matter separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 17:9), and, "A whisperer separates the best of friends" (Proverbs 16:28). What made the matter worse was that neither of us had said anything about the other, and even if we had, the words should never have been repeated.

God commands us not to be talebearers (Leviticus 19:16). Those who gossip and spread rumors are not of a faithful spirit (Proverbs 11:13). As with everything in our lives, what we do with men affects our relationship with God. If we do not have a faithful spirit and conceal a matter and forget it, can we expect God to conceal what we have done (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31)?

When Joseph, sold into slavery in Egypt, worked in Potiphar's house, the master's wife started a rumor that he tried to rape her (Genesis 39:1-20). Potiphar and his servants believed her lie and Joseph was cast into prison, where he would remain for several years.

In Acts 21:26-33 Paul was arrested after being accused of teaching "'all men everywhere against the people, the law, and this place; and furthermore he also brought Greeks into the temple and has defiled this holy place.' (For they had previously seen Trophimus the Ephesian with him in the city, whom they *supposed* that Paul had brought into the temple.)" Paul was persecuted and nearly beaten for these rumors, assumptions and bald-faced lies.

How do rumors start? This article began with certain facts about Mr. Armstrong. After the first few words, most readers start defending him and label the writer in a negative light. Soon one's mind is racing, and the last few lines of the article have already been forgotten. Three things have happened: one has assumed, judged and reacted—all based on a few unsubstantiated facts.

We can prevent this from happening.

- 1) Get the facts. Say nothing in ignorance. If unsure of the facts, or unsure of the source of the information, keep it to yourself.
- 2) If it is a problem, go to the one gossiping or starting the rumors and talk to them. Do not discuss another's sins with your friends and family. If the guilty party apologizes and repents, as far as God is concerned, that is the end. No one else needs to have any knowledge of it.
- 3) Listen. Listen to what is said and how it is said. Why did he say what he did? Did you misunderstand or take it wrong? Be careful not to jump to a conclusion. Make sure you understand clearly what was said. If you need to, ask a question to clarify the matter.
- 4) Think before you speak. Do not exaggerate or distort what you hear.
- 5) Learn to forgive others. Do not hold grudges or bring up old faults or ways you have been wronged in the past.

There is a difference between talking about someone who is mutually liked and respected and gossiping. We may talk about someone with respect, in pity or in an attempt to help them. Gossip, on the other hand, is usually derogatory and ugly. Though the gossip may not be aware of his motives (jealousy, pride, vanity, etc.), the underlying aim is to destroy the subject of the rumor.

Joshua 22:10-34 illustrates how people hear something and take it wrongly. The tribes of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, having lands on the east bank of the Jordan River, built a great, impressive altar. Hearing of it, the rest of the tribes gathered to go to war against them because they mistakenly thought it was an altar to worship and serve other gods.

Fortunately, before civil war broke out, the eastern tribes explained that the altar was built as a witness to future generations to remember their kinship with the rest of Israel (verses 22-29). When Israel heard this explanation, "it pleased them" (verse 30). They narrowly averted an ugly and destructive war by getting the facts and listening to the explanation.

Remember what was written about Mr. Armstrong to introduce this article? That same man played a mean trumpet and sang "Hello Dolly" in a movie by the same name. Many called this New Orleans native "Satchmo," but his real name was Louis Armstrong.