

Rumors

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Contemporary Muslims are fascinated by conspiracy theories which limit their capacity for rational discussion of international affairs. In Nigeria they refused the polio vaccine out of fear the vaccine would make their offspring sterile. Mobile phones and the internet in Pakistan are said to cause a virus if people answer phone calls from certain numbers. Rumor has it that a certain 45 year-old man heard from a friend who saw it in a newspaper that a man dropped dead just after answering his mobile phone. A text message claimed that trucks carrying a million melons infected with HIV virus had been smuggled into an Arab country by Israel. The absurdity of the rumor (HIV cannot be transmitted by eating melons) notwithstanding, rumors can sometimes have fatal consequences. In 1979, Pakistanis burned down the U.S. embassy in Islamabad, killing several people, on the basis of a rumor that the U.S. had taken over the Kaaba, Islam's holiest shrine. In fact, a group of Islamic extremists had done it.

The apostle Paul writes in 1 Timothy 6:3-4, "If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railing, **evil surmisings** ..." Obviously there are men who prefer the excitement of evil surmisings as well as the railing and strife to actual self-denial and humility in human relationships. I can complain of the injustices real or supposed and feel justified in not honoring my masters or my servants even though they might be my brethren who are faithful and beloved. The evil suspicion may be very shocking and maybe only God knows the truth, but the suspicion is no less evil before God and damaging to our relationships with our brethren who really are beloved and faithful. You may not know the whole truth and the whole truth that you don't know might be that the evil you have supposed never happened or it might be that if you knew the whole truth, you might be more merciful and patient.

Remember that God in heaven is watching and He knows the whole truth and the true motivations of every heart and he sees our mistaken conclusions and all the hurt that sometimes results from what we say and do or don't do. We can imagine the holy angels slowing shaking their heads. tp