

The Christian Arsenal

www.christianarsenal.com

What is an Urban Legend?

An urban legend is the equivalent of ancient folklore, accelerated a few hundred years. Folklore took centuries to develop. Now with the help of the internet and email, an Urban Legend can begin in a matter of days. They begin to take on a life of their own.

Treat all email stories like mythology. If it smells funny, there's probably a reason for it. Before you replicate such "thought contagions", track down the source and confirm it for yourself. Don't believe everything you read on the Internet, especially if it satisfies several of the following conditions:

Signs of an Urban Legend, Myth or Folklore:

- Appears mysteriously and spreads spontaneously in varying forms.
- Contains elements of humor or horror (the horror often "punishes" someone who refuses to forward the Legend).
- Makes good storytelling.
- Does not have to be false, although most are. Urban Legends often have a basis in fact, but it's their life after-the-fact (particularly in reference to the second and third points) that gives them particular interest."
- It is highly inflammatory.
- It asks that you send a copy on to everyone you know.
- It does not mention any names. References to a "friend of a friend", or an unnamed relative, such as "my cousin", or "some girl/boy/man/woman" are highly suspicious.
- It does **not** cite any specific sources ("the NY Times" is **not** a citation -- "the January 22, 1996 edition of the NY Times" **is**, though).
- It **does** cite sources, but the sources cannot be found. Anyone can tag onto a piece of e-mail a bogus source to make it sound more authoritative.
- It does not say exactly when this event occurred. "Last month" is a relative term that means "the month before the one that I, the reader, am currently in". If the story has been circulating on the Internet for three years (not unusual for urban legends), then "last month" becomes completely meaningless unless there is a specific date mentioned.
- It says, "THIS IS A TRUE STORY!" That's an automatic warning flag.

So we, as Christians, must develop a sense of **Christian Discernment**. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is. If it seems to horrible to believe, it probably is. No, Microsoft is not giving away money if you forward an email. No, Timmy won't get the money for his new liver if you forward an email. No, using deodorant doesn't cause cancer. No, you cannot email guardian angels. No, you do not have a black heart and God will not strike you down if you don't forward this or that email. We must remember that we are the light of the world. We are the witness of Jesus Christ. How does it look to the lost world to see Christians perpetuating myths and promises of luck and evil? Telling untruths and half truths by way of email and then expecting the lost world to believe anything else we may say.

Philippians 4:8

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.

Colossians 4:6

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Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.

1 Timothy 6:20-21

Guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge" -- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith.

If you're not sure what is and isn't true, then check out these sites below. They research spammed emails to find out the real truth behind all of them. When you get one of these spammed emails, be sure to let the person who sent it know and give them the links below.

Links to Urban Legend Search Sites

The AFU & Urban Legends Archive - An archive of Urban Legends and Folklore.
Break the Chain - Our goal is to educate people about the e-mail chain letters circulating on the 'net, share the facts, give our interpretations, and provide the tools and information people will need to make their own decision about the validity of a message.
Christians & the Dangers of Urban Legends - An embarrassing aspect of Christendom is a gullibility in believing every story or rumor they hear. This paper is a rebuke to that.
Data Fellows Hoax Warnings - Hoax warnings are typically scare alerts started by malicious people - and passed on by innocent users who think they are helping the community by spreading the warning. This page is considered the industry standard information source for new virus hoaxes and false alerts.
Hoax Busters - Interspersed among the junk mail and spam that fills our Internet e-mail boxes are dire warnings about devastating new viruses, Trojans that eat the heart out of your system, and malicious software that can steal the computer right off your desk. Added to that are messages about free money, children in trouble, and other items designed to grab you and get you to forward the message to everyone you know. Most all of these messages are hoaxes or chain letters.
Make Your Own Urban Legend - If you have an e-mail account and gullible friends, you have undoubtedly received dire warnings, sad stories, unbelievable offers, and lame recycled jokes that supposedly "really happened." Are you tired of being on the receiving end? Why not hop on the misinformation superhighway with our Urban Legend Generator *?
Scam Busters - Internet ScamBusters is an award winning free electronic newsletter (e-zine) to help people protect themselves from Internet scams, misinformation and hype that are costing entrepreneurs a fortune.
Snopes - The definitive Internet reference source for urban legends, folklore, myths, rumors, and misinformation.
Truth or Fiction - When you get emails with warnings, virus alerts, inspirational stories, business opportunities, and pleas for help...check them out to see if they are Truth! or Fiction!
The Urban Legend Combat Kit - The Urban Legend Combat Kit is a free collection of canned responses to help you combat Internet myths and urban legends. When someone sends you an urban legend, just cut and paste the appropriate response from this site.
The Urban Legends Research Center - This site is dedicated to the examination of Urban Legends, Urban Beliefs, Ghost Legends and folklore in general.
V-Myths - Learn about computer virus myths, hoaxes, urban legends, and the implications if you believe in them. You can also search a list of computer virus hoaxes from A to Z.

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