

Gossip

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English Definitions

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines the noun "gossip" as "(1) a person who habitually reveals personal or sensational facts about others; (2) a rumor or report of an intimate nature; a chatty talk; the subject matter of gossip." The verb "gossip" means "to relate gossip." A "gossipmonger" is "a person who starts or spreads gossip." The adjective "gossipy" describes one who is "characterized by, full of, or given to gossip."

The Bing Dictionary gives the following definition of gossip (noun): "(1) conversation about personal matters: conversation about the personal details of other people's lives, whether rumor or fact, especially when malicious; (2) casual conversation: informal conversation or writing about recent and often personal events; (3) habitual talker: somebody who habitually discusses the personal details of others' lives."

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary says when used as a noun, gossip refers to "(1) casual conversation or unsubstantiated reports about other people; (2) chiefly derogatory a person who likes talking about other people's private lives." Used as a verb, it describes the act of "engaging in gossip."

Occurrences in the English

The English word "gossip" occurs 7x in 7 verses in the NASB (Prov. 20:19; Rom. 1:29; 2 Cor. 12:20; 1 Tim. 3:11; 5:13; 2 Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3).

The NASB translation of Proverbs 20:19 says, "He who goes about as a slanderer reveals secrets, Therefore do not associate with a ***gossip** [Lit., one who opens his lips]. The KJV says, "meddle not with him that **flattereth with his lips**." The NKJV says, "do not associate with one who **flatters with his lips**."

The NASB translation of Romans 1:29 reads, "being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are ***gossips**." Both the KJV and the NKJV translate this as "**whisperers**."

The NASB translation of 2 Corinthians 12:20 says, "For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, ***gossip**, arrogance, disturbances." Both the KJV and the NKJV translate this as "**whisperings**."

The NASB translation of 1 Timothy 3:11 says, “Women must likewise be dignified, not malicious ***gossips**, but temperate, faithful in all things.” Both the KJV and the NKJV translate this as “**not slanderers**.”

The NASB translation of 1 Timothy 5:13 says, “At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also ***gossips** and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.” The KJV renders this as “**tattlers**” while the NKJV reads “**gossips**.”

The NASB translation of 2 Timothy 3:3 refers to those who are “unloving, irreconcilable, malicious ***gossips**, without self-control, brutal, haters of good.” The KJV renders this as “**false accusers**” while NKJV reads “**slanderers**.”

The NASB translation of Titus 2:3 says, “Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious ***gossips** nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good.” The KJV renders this as “**not false accusers**” while the NKJV reads “**not slanderers**.”

Occurrences in the Greek

Greek Word #1228

Thomas defines the adjective διάβολος [diabolos], derived from **diaballō** [to bring charges (usually with hostile intent)], as “slandering, accusing falsely” [1228]. BDAG say it “(1) pertains to engagement in slander, slanderous; (2) substantively, one who engages in slander, in our literature as title of the principal transcendent evil being, i.e., the adversary/devil, [which was] already current in the LXX.” Louw & Nida define it as “(a title for the Devil, literally ‘slanderer’): the principal supernatural evil being - ‘Devil, Satan’” [12.34] or as a “(derivative of διαβάλλω ‘to slander,’ not occurring in the NT) one who engages in slander - ‘slanderer’” [33.397]. The word occurs 37x in 35 verses in the NT. Most frequently, it is translated “devil” (Matt. 4:1, 5, 8, 11; 13:39; 25:41; Luke 4:2, 3, 6, 13; 8:12; John 6:70; 8:44; 13:2; Acts 10:38; 13:10; Eph. 4:27; 6:11; 1 Tim. 3:6, 7; 2 Tim. 2:26; Heb. 2:14; James 4:7; 1 Pet. 5:8; 1 John 3:8 [3x], 10; Jude 9; Rev. 2:10; 12:9, 12; 20:2, 10), but thrice it is rendered “malicious gossips” (1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3).

Greek Word #5587

Thomas defines the noun ψιθυρισμός [psithurismos], derived from **psithurizō** [to whisper], as “a whispering” [5587]. BDAG say it is used “in our literature only in a bad sense [describing] derogatory information about someone that is offered in a tone of confidentiality, (secret) gossip, tale-bearing.” Louw & Nida define it as “providing harmful information about a person, often spoken in whispers or in low voice, with the implication that such information is not widely known and therefore should presumably be kept secret - ‘gossip’” [33.404]. It occurs 1x in the NT, where it is translated “gossip” (2 Cor. 12:20).

Greek Word #5588

Thomas defines the noun ψιθυριστής [psithuristēs], derived from the same as **psithurismos** [a whispering], as “a whisperer” [5588]. BDAG say it refers to a “rumormonger, tale-bearer.” Louw & Nida define it as “one who habitually engages in gossip - ‘gossiper’” [33.405]. The word occurs 1x in the NT, where it is translated “gossips” (Rom. 1:29).

Greek Word #5396

Thomas defines the verb φλυαρέω [phluareō], derived from **phluaros** [babbling], as “to talk nonsense” [5396]. BDAG say it means “to indulge in utterance that makes no sense, talk nonsense (about), disparage... disparaging us w. outrageous statements or chattering maliciously about us (=bad-mouthing us).” Louw & Nida say it means “to speak in such a way as to make no sense, presumably because of ignorance of what is involved - ‘to talk nonsense.’ In some languages ‘to talk nonsense’ is ‘to talk without understanding what one is saying,’ but in other instances an equivalent may be ‘to talk without anybody being able to understand what one is saying’” [33.374]. This word occurs 1x in the NT, where it is translated “unjustly accusing” (3 John 10).

Greek Word #5397

Thomas defines the adjective φλύαρος [phluaros], derived from **phluō** [to babble], as “babbling” [5397]. BDAG say it refers to one who is “gossipy.” Louw & Nida say this word is a “(derivative of φλυαρέω ‘to talk nonsense’ [33.374]) [is] pertaining to talking nonsense—‘one who talks nonsense, gossipy’ It is possible that in 1 Tim. 5:13, φλύαρος should be rendered as ‘gossipy’ in view of the fact that one who speaks nonsense about someone else is normally gossiping” [33.375]. This word occurs 1x in the NT, where it is translated “gossips” (1 Tim. 5:13).

Gossip is Characteristic of Sinful Humanity

Gossip is commonly practiced in our fallen sinful world (Rom. 1:28-32, esp. vs. 29). It is reflected in the lives of those who hold a form of godliness but have denied its power (2 Tim. 3:1-5, esp. vs. 3).

Gossip is Typical of Wayward Brethren

Sometimes this sin finds its way into the church of God, especially among those who are proud (3 John 9-10). Paul was fearful that, when he next visited the Corinthians, he would find that they were still engaging in gossip and other related transgressions (2 Cor. 12:20-21).

Gossip is not Representative of Faithful Disciples

The wives of elders and deacons must be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things (1 Tim. 3:11). The same should be true of older, mature Christian women (Titus 2:3-5). Younger women/widows must exercise caution in this regard (1 Tim. 5:11-15).

Conclusion

One must distinguish between legitimate conversation and gossip. For the sake of illustration, consider the example of the Corinthians. Paul said, “For I have been informed concerning you, my brethren, by Chloe’s people, that there are quarrels among you” (1 Cor. 1:10-13, esp. vs. 11). The inspired apostle treated as factual the report of their tolerance of immorality (1 Cor. 5:1-2). Offering instruction and correction regarding the observance of the Lord’s supper, he said, “I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it” (1 Cor. 11:17-22). From a positive standpoint, Paul was greatly comforted by Titus’ report of their repentance (2 Cor. 7:5-7). His own ministry was the subject of good reports and evil reports (2 Cor. 6:4-10; cf. Rom. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:13).

As Satan is a relentless accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:9-12; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; Zech. 3:1-5), one who gossips engages in malicious and slanderous accusation. Satan expects the worst, longing for our downfall and destruction (Luke 22:31-32; 1 Pet. 5:8-9); so likewise does one who engages in gossip.

Therefore, as followers of the Lord Jesus, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth (1 Pet. 2:21-25), may we all (male and female, young and old) guard our lips (Prov. 13:3; 20:19) and bridle our tongues (James 3:2-12).