

**I'm glad you asked:**

**What really is Gossip?**

**Don Reigstad**

What exactly is “gossip”? It seems that some folks suggest that whenever we speak of someone else without his/her present it is gossip. Some would prevent genuine sharing of concern and/or prayer for another person not present. This has led me to a biblical word study and here is the fruit.

1. Dictionary Definition: “Idle talk or rumor, especially regarding the personal or private affairs of others.” (Random House) Middle English – gos – sip, God – parent. Archaic – a friend, especially a woman.

2. English occurrences in the Bible (N.T.)

NIV

2 Corinthians 12:20 “factions, slander, gossip, etc.” (RSV, NRSV, NAB)

3 John 1:10 “gossiping maliciously”

Romans 1:29 “...malice. They are gossips.” (RSV, NRS, NAB)

1 Timothy 5:13 “but also gossips: busybodies” (RSV, NRSV, NAB)

3. Greek words translated

a. “Kata Laleo”. Literal: “speaking down”

1. Lexicon – “speak against, speak evil of, defame, slander.”

2. Uses

James 4:11(2) speak not evil of one another...of the law.

1 Peter 2:12 They speak against you as evil doers.

1 Peter 3:16 They speak evil of you.

2 Corinthians 12:20 backbitings

1 Peter 2:1 evil speakings

Romans 1:30 backbiters

(Rom. 1:30 & 2Cor. 12:20 “whisperings”- always with above & in a bad way.

b. “Logois Ponerous”. Literal: “evil speaking”

1. Lexicon – “talk nonsense, bring unjustified charges against.”

2. Uses - 3 John 1:10 “gossiping maliciously regarding us.”

1 Timothy 5:13 “gossiping maliciously regarding us.”

4. Conclusion of the Matter

Given the etymology of **katalaleo** and the New Testament usage of it, it would seem that it clearly has a more narrow focus than the English “gossip.” While the English “gossip” may include any “idle chatter”, **katalaleo** would imply, if not require, evil intent, a “speaking against” or a “speaking down” about someone.

Further, the English notion is one of private talk while the Greek is not restricted in this direction. While idle chatter may easily become evil speaking (**katalaleo** or **logoi poneroi**), it should not be condemned with the biblical weight of translations that sometimes grope for but do not find the perfect English equivalent for a Greek word.

G:/Sr.Pastor/theology/Gossip