
Words of Truth

Is "Gossip" Wrong?

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What is gossiping? The term "gossip" is defined like this: "casual or unconstrained [not restricted] conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true" (New Oxford American Dictionary). Other dictionaries state that the term "gossip" is "idle talk" (<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/gossip?s=t>) and even includes rumors and trivial, chatty talk (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/gossip>).

The term "gossip" does not appear in the King James translation of the Scriptures. In the New King James Version of the Scriptures you find the term "gossips" once (I Timothy 5:13). The term translated "gossips" has a Greek definition that does not fit exactly into the English word. Strong's defines that Greek word (φλύαρος; phlyaros) as this: "of persons uttering or doing silly things, garrulous, babbling of things, foolish, trifling, vain" (Strong's # 5397). When you study I Timothy 5:3-16 you should be able to understand that younger widows should remarry rather than be supported by the local church being thus enabled to engage in senseless things. Such senseless things include talking too much about nothing (cf. Proverbs 10:19).

On many occasions I have had talks with people about gossip wherein they think the word means talking about other people behind that person's back. Some include, in their definition of gossip, talking "bad" about someone else when you haven't talked to that person about that bad thing. One thing is for sure, there is no one single definition of gossip that is widely understood or shared.

Gossip is wrong if, by using the word gossip, you are talking about people who are not controlling their tongues (Psalms 39:1, James 1:19, and James 3:1-18). Gossip is wrong if, by using the word gossip, you mean slandering someone (Psalms 101:5, Proverbs 10:18, and Romans 3:8). However, that does not mean that talking about someone in a negative manner is wrong. That is true even if you are spreading that negative report to other people. Nor does it mean that giving or receiving a negative report, if it is credible, is wrong. We will use the Scriptures from this point forward to prove that both of those statements are Scripturally right.

It Is Not Wrong To Talk About People Negatively

Jesus, who serves as our perfect example to be followed (I Peter 2:21-22), talked negatively about other people. He even did so "behind their backs". Notice: *"For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven... Then Jesus said unto them, Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees... Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe*

and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren... Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf. And he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod... In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Matthew 5:20, Matthew 16:6, Matthew 23:1-8, Mark 8:14-15, and Luke 12:1).

We are also told to follow approved examples in the Scriptures. One of those approved examples is the Apostle Paul (I Corinthians 4:16 and I Corinthians 11:1). Paul talked negatively about Hymenaeus and Alexander (I Timothy 1:19-20). Paul talked negatively about Hymenaeus and Philetus (II Timothy 2:14-18). Paul talked negatively about Demas and Alexander (II Timothy 4:10-17). Paul also talked negatively about the Apostle Peter when he erred (Galatians 2:11-17). He talked negatively, in general, about a whole group of Jews on more than one occasion (Romans 2:1-29 and I Thessalonians 2:14-16). Unless you accuse Paul, John (III John 9-11), and Jesus of sinning; you cannot conclude that talking about other people is wrong. Now, let's shift our study to giving and receiving reports about other people.

It is Not Wrong To Give Or Receive Credible Reports About Other People

You would think that the previous points cover this to some degree, but for some people they would not agree. Thus, we will specify that giving or receiving NEGATIVE reports about others is not wrong (Romans 16:17-18). How did Paul know about some of the problems in Corinth? Notice: "*For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you... It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife... For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it" (I Corinthians 1:11, I Corinthians 5:1, and I Corinthians 11:18). Clearly, you can see that giving or receiving reports is Scripturally right. All we need to be sure of is that those reports are credible (Proverbs 18:13).*

Conclusion

Yes, it could be said that gossiping is wrong. The danger is, what you mean by gossip being wrong LIKELY will not be what someone understands you to mean. Thus, it would be expedient for us to be clear in defining our terms when we talk about things such as gossip. For, if we lead people to believe that it is wrong to talk about other people, we are leading them to believe something that is wrong. Furthermore, we are throwing Jesus, Paul, and other faithful men into a pot of sin. Since terms are ever changing this study is an exercise in the need for us to use plain speech (II Corinthians 3:12)!