

Should You Keep Your Husband's Sexual Sin a Secret?

Consider this predicament: Your boss, the company CEO, has given you a high-level project. After a few months on the job, you discover that your new responsibilities involve falsifying records.

Not only that, but it appears your boss has been trying to cover up questionable accounting practices. When you confront the CEO, he makes it clear that your career will be over if you share his secret. He makes a strong argument that you have much more to lose than gain by going public. Then he demands your silence, asserting his authority as your supervisor to ensure you will comply.

Out of respect for his position of authority, do you keep his secret? Even if means you are putting yourself at risk, now that you are knowledgeable of a crime but choosing not to report it?

Now read this scenario: Mary's husband, Jim, hasn't been himself for months—moody, short-tempered, abrupt. One night, Mary wakes up and Jim is not there. When she walks downstairs, the reflection of the computer screen in the dining room mirror tells the story.

Jim says he is sorry and it won't happen again. But the computer history tells a different story—he is binging on porn, and it's only getting worse. When Mary suggests counseling, Jim refuses. Asserting his position as leader of the home, Jim also forbids her from telling anyone. Ever. Period.

Out of respect for his position of authority, should Mary keep

his secret? Even if it means postponing her own healing and subjecting her family to the devastating effects of her husband's escalating sexual sin?

Why is it that the corporate whistle-blower is applauded for standing up for what is right but the wife who wants to sound the alarm is often silenced by the very community that should be offering her the most support? Unfortunately, the not-so-subtle message being communicated by some in the church to these hurting women is: "Honor your husband by keeping silent, even at the expense of your own healing."

Who is communicating this destructive message? It's the elder who tells a wife she is overreacting. It's the Sunday School teacher who whispers maybe she should first try heating things up in the bedroom. It's the pastor who suggests the wife spend some more time praying for her husband to come around before meeting with a counselor. It's anyone who even thinks, *That is just how God wired men.*

I'm not advocating a wife take to Facebook to share her pain or make a phone call to activate the prayer chain. There is no healing to be found there. But she should be free to get the help she needs in the light of this devastating revelation, and it's time the church came alongside her with their full support.

Yes, she should be cautious who she shares with, and certainly it would be considerate of her to share her intentions with her husband to get outside help. But if a husband attempts to use his authority as the spiritual head of the household to discourage his wife from getting help, then someone needs to call that out for what it is: spiritual manipulation, misuse of authority and unloving, self-centered sin.

There is nothing that strikes at our own core more deeply than our spouse's sexual sin. Marriage, by its very nature—the becoming of one flesh—means the husband's struggle is now the

wife's struggle. So if a wife wants to talk to someone about his struggle (which is now her struggle), she should be encouraged to do so, regardless of her husband's discomfort.

A husband might wonder why his wife would even want to share her painful story with anyone anyway. It is something most husbands have tried so hard to hide. They don't like to acknowledge its ugly existence, much less have conversations about it. Here is what husbands need to realize:

- Wives don't *like* talking about it; we *need* to talk about it. When we get the thoughts out of our heads and express them and hear feedback, it helps us grieve. It is like a valve releasing some of the pressure that has built up.
- Talking about it helps us feel less isolated and alone.
- Talking about it helps us organize our thoughts and emotions that feel out of control. Any sense of control is calming in the midst of this storm.

I believe there are thousands of wives sitting in our church pews each Sunday, suffering alone in silence. What can churches do to release wives from being their husbands' secret-keepers?

- Become a congregation where people are real, where suffering in this world is understood to be inevitable and where the body is involved in helping broken people heal. This example will give courage to couples that are afraid to share their brokenness.
- Give wives a safe and confidential place to share.
- Hold husbands accountable to their positions as spiritual leaders Sunday through Saturday—do this from the pulpit, on the golf course, one on one and in small groups.
- Don't support a theology of secret-keeping.

Think about it this: Who do we partner with when we help hide

sin? In 2 Thessalonians 2:7, the Bible says the secret power of lawlessness is already at work and will remain at work until the man of lawlessness is completely removed. Church, we partner with our very enemy when we encourage sin to remain hidden. To do so under the cloak of “respect for spiritual authority” is a joke. And the enemy is laughing while our marriages are dying.

Leaders of the church, free these wives. Encourage them to get the help they need. If that means exposing their husbands’ secret sin against their husbands’ will, then so be it. It is the most loving and respectful thing they can do on behalf of their marriage.

Marsha Fisher and her husband, Jeff, are the creators of *Inside Out Ministries* and *Porn to Purity*. They are using their marriage recovery story as a platform to shed light on the growing problem of pornography addiction within the church and the gospel-centered resources available for those who want to find freedom.

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