

# What Should I Tell My Spouse about My Sexual Sin?



by J. ALASDAIR GROVES

---

What should you say to your spouse about your sexual sin? It's a question as important as it is uncomfortable. The spouse who has sinned will dread exposure, shame, and the emotional turmoil that will follow. The spouse sinned against will be deeply hurt and, usually, thrown into a chaotic mix of other feelings—confusion, shock, anger, and self-doubt to name a few. While most Christians know that confessing sin is right and important, actually speaking about sexual sin to your spouse puts that conviction to a strenuous test.

I will not try to convince you that you *should* confess sexual sin to your spouse. If you are questioning whether you should, I would point you to a host of recent, compelling cases for the importance of confessing sexual sin to the Lord, other people who will help you walk in sexual faithfulness, and also to your spouse.<sup>1</sup> They owe their mindset

---

1. See for example: *Finally Free*, Heath Lambert (Zondervan, 2013); *Sexual Sanity for Men*, David White (New Growth Press, 2012); *Redeem Your Marriage*, Curtis Solomon (New Growth Press, 2022); *Closing the Window*, Tim Chester (IVP Books, 2010); *Hide or Seek*, John Freeman (New Growth Press, 2014); *The Death of Porn*, Ray Ortlund (Crossway, 2021); and *Rescue Skills*, Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes (P&R Publishing, 2021).

*Alasdair Groves (MDiv) is the executive director of CCEF and serves on the faculty. He coauthored the book Untangling Emotions.*

and conviction to a long tradition of God's people seeing the need to confess sin to others, traceable through the likes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*, the Puritans, Augustine, and of course, to Scripture itself—including David's poignant repentance over his adultery in Psalm 51.

My intention in this article is not to lay out a full theology of confession. My goal is somewhat narrower. It is to offer a framework, fleshed out from Paul's comments on loving honesty in Ephesians 4:29, that will help you know *how* to confess your sexual sin well to your wife or husband (though your definition of "well" may need some reorientation). In fact, I intend to narrow the discussion even further, for while this article does address the entire range of sexual sins from lustful thoughts to adulterous affairs, we will spend the majority of our time focusing on the more serious end of the spectrum. Sins that have escaped the inner recesses of your mind and hardened into actual actions—pornography, adultery, and the like—generally have bigger consequences for your spouse than sins of the imagination or gaze. Yet, while confessing sin of any kind to your spouse is incredibly difficult, it is also incredibly valuable. Confessing sexual sin to the person you have married is one of the greatest services you can render to them. Indeed, it is a profound way to honor them.

We have good reason to take courage when we follow Jesus into confession of sin.

However, before we unpack the framework from Ephesians, there is one thing you need: hope. So let me remind you at the outset of this discussion that we have good reason to take courage when we follow Jesus into confession of sin because we have his help, friendship, promises, and love.

### **Jesus Is with You and for You**

Jesus is a friend you can trust, utterly, even when your friends and loved ones pull away from you. No matter what you say to your spouse, no matter how it goes when you do, the rock-solid hope you have is not that you or your spouse will say the right things (or not say the wrong things). Your core hope is that, when you come to Jesus in repentance for your sin, you can be certain Jesus knows, sees, forgives, and will not leave

or forsake you. Your spouse's anger, hurt, or withdrawal do not define you, nor are they the ultimate measure of your character. Jesus is a friend like no other. Not only does he care about you, but he has the power to directly solve your greatest problem. He not only died to save you from the guilt of sexual betrayal, he also lovingly guards, guides, and strengthens you as you face continued tempta-

Confessing sexual sin is an act of love, an unequivocal declaration that you prioritize what is best for your life partner over what is comfortable for you.

tions. He is God himself, who knows what suffering is like. He will strengthen you each day to confess sin, resist it, repent of it when you fall, battle it in your desires and in your actions, and create bulwarks against the temptations that arise. That Jesus befriends sinners like us means we cannot lose by following his call to love our spouses with honest, humble confession of sin.

### **A Framework for the Wise Confession of Sexual Sin**

The counterintuitive reality of confessing your sin to your marriage partner is that there is nothing more freeing and relieving. Perhaps that sounds crazy. Or, at best, that it is only half the story. Relief for your conscience can seem a small consolation when you fear ruining your entire marriage. However scary it is, it is also *good*. Confessing sexual sin is an act of love, an unequivocal declaration that you prioritize what is best for your life partner over what is comfortable for you. It is a gift that provides crucial information about what needs repair in the one relationship in which your spouse has invested their entire life. It opens a door to profound deepening in your marriage through repentance and forgiveness. It protects your spouse from walking in ignorance into the sudden shame, shock, and chaos that will come if your sin is suddenly exposed. Proverbs, as well as every movie you have ever watched and every book you have ever read, warns us urgently that sin almost always ends up getting revealed in one way or another.

And yes, the initial reaction of many spouses will be hard to handle. But without exception, keeping sin secret is detrimental to every

To continue reading this article, visit [ccef.org/jbc](http://ccef.org/jbc) to purchase the individual journal issue or subscribe to the *Journal of Biblical Counseling*.

*The Journal of Biblical Counseling*

(ISSN: 1063-2166) is published by:

Christian Counseling & Educational Foundation

1803 East Willow Grove Avenue

Glenside, PA 19038

[www.ccef.org](http://www.ccef.org)

Copyright © 2022 CCEF

All rights reserved.