

## A One-Woman Man – Fidelity

We live in an era in which marital fidelity is severely compromised. Only a very small portion of the population has marital relations with only one person. Most people in our culture today are involved with a string of relationships before they get married, and then after marriage, many people are not faithful to their spouse.

Current studies of American couples indicate that 20 to 40% of married men and 20 to 25% of married women will have an extramarital affair during their lifetime. Infidelity is a worldwide phenomenon that occurs with remarkable regularity, despite near universal disapproval of this behavior.<sup>1</sup>

Fidelity is so important that God lists unrepentant adultery among other soul-damning sins.

*1Co 6:9-10 Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, ... shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

One of the marks of an unbeliever is unrepentant infidelity. You can't live that way and think of yourself as a Christian.

God will forgive adulterers if they repent. But a marriage may not survive when one of the partners commits adultery, even if the guilty party repents. That sin usually has terrible consequences for a marriage, and many do not recover from it.

God requires marital fidelity. Both partners must remain faithfully committed to the marriage and neither may be involved with others.

Most of what I'm about to say I shouldn't need to say. I think all of us are well aware of these truths. I don't know that any of us are guilty of adultery. But we need to review these principles occasionally and reinforce them, especially for the benefit of young people. We must affirm what the Bible teaches on these issues and state clearly what we expect. Given what our culture is teaching today, and given how common infidelity is, we must affirm these biblical truths forcefully and clearly.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ideas.ted.com/10-facts-about-infidelity-helen-fisher/>

## What does the Bible teach about marital fidelity?

### I. Marital fidelity requires monogamy.

- A. God's original plan for marriage was that one man should enter into lifelong covenant with one woman. Marriage is supposed to be monogamous—one man and one woman *leave* their families and *cleave* to one another. No one else should be allowed to intrude into this relationship.
- B. That was God's original design, but we find that people corrupted that pattern very quickly. In the OT, we find men taking multiple wives quite early in Genesis.
- C. Even among the patriarchs, we find polygamy. Abraham had multiple wives, as did Jacob. King David had a bunch of them, and Solomon had hundreds of wives and concubines. Most of the kings of Israel and Judah had multiple wives.
- D. Although God allowed that in the OT, Jesus verifies that polygamy was not God's original design. In the NT, it becomes clear that God intends one man to be married to one woman.
- E. One of the biblical expressions that describes this exclusive arrangement is "a one-woman man." The KJV translates it as "a husband of one wife," but the original language says literally "a one-woman man." Let's look at those two NT texts that use this expression:  
*1Tim 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;*  
*Titus 1:6 If any be blameless, **the husband of one wife**, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.*
- F. Both of these verses pertain particularly to the qualifications of church leaders, but I believe that they express God's intention for all men. Every married man should be a "one-woman man."
- G. But what does that expression really mean? The sense of this expression is "a faithful husband." Marital faithfulness/fidelity is the issue. A husband should be a one-woman kind of man, and a wife should be a one-man kind of woman.

There is a similar phrase that pertains to women in 1 Cor 7:2—"Let every woman have her own husband." (εκαστη τον ιδιον ανδρα εχετω)

In my research, I found that the Roman people had a word to denote that concept—*univira*—a “one husband” kind of wife. The term is used frequently in literature and even on tomb stones to describe a woman who was dedicated to one man throughout her adult life.

The first-century bc poet Catullus wrote, “To live content with one’s husband alone is the greatest compliment a wife can receive.” A Roman imperial inscription reads, “She lived fifty years and was satisfied with one husband.”<sup>2</sup>

A Christian woman is to be *univira*—a one-husband kind of woman, just as a Christian man is to be a one-woman kind of man.

H. You may remember that Jesus confirms monogamy when he said,

Mt 19:5 *For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they two shall be one flesh?*

**Trans:** Marriage fidelity requires that spouses are loyal to one another. They retain the commitments they made to one another when they said their wedding vows. They maintain their marriage covenant and don’t allow anyone else to intrude into that relationship, which leads to the next point...

II. Marital fidelity requires exclusion. Marriage is an exclusive relationship—it excludes all others.

When we take marriage vows, we are promising two basic things: love and fidelity. We will love and cleave to our spouse only. The marriage establishes this exclusive relationship. No one else can be a part of it; it exists only between the husband and the wife; it excludes all others.

There are a couple of senses in which marriage is exclusive.

A. Marriage requires *physical* exclusion.

1. Marriage is a union between one man and one woman that allows no intruders. Marriage excludes all other intimate relationships for the married couple.

The traditional wedding vows includes this language: “Forsaking all others, keep only unto her/him, so long as you both shall live.” That’s the biblical expectation. You make a unique commitment to your spouse and you forsake all others.

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<sup>2</sup> David W. Jones and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *God, Marriage, and Family: Rebuilding the Biblical Foundation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 242.

2. Adultery happens when a spouse fails to forsake all others. The definition of adultery is intimate activity with someone other than your spouse.
3. And that kind of activity is clearly and repeatedly prohibited in the Bible. One of the Ten Commandments says “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex 20:14; Deut 5:18). Similar statements are found throughout the Bible. This is an obvious moral requirement. It’s a black-and-white prohibition; it’s a rule without exceptions; it’s true in every case.
4. Living in unrepentant adultery marks you as an unbeliever. Adultery is mentioned the “vice lists” of the Bible, and it is clearly a sin that will damn a soul to hell if the guilty person does not repent of it. Adulterers will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Marriage requires *physical* exclusivity. Spouses must not be physically involved in any other intimate relationship. But there is another sense in which marriage excludes relationships with others.

B. Marriage requires *emotional* exclusion.

1. When the Bible mentions adultery, it usually has the physical side of things in mind. E.g., the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:3f) was caught “in the act.” Adultery usually refers to the physical act of infidelity.
2. However, Jesus said that if you lust after a woman in your heart, you have committed adultery (Mt 5:28). So there is a form of adultery that is emotional or mental but not physical. It’s possible to have an emotional or mental relationship with a person not one’s spouse, without it being physical.
3. In what sense can adultery be emotional or mental?
  - a) Most obviously, mental adultery can happen when a man looks on a woman with lust in his heart, just like Jesus said. Jesus calls that adultery and so should we. In a certain sense, adultery of the heart is cheating on your spouse even if no physical activity happens. A man’s desire should be for his wife, not for some other woman, whether physically present or not. Same for women.

One thing in our culture that facilitates mental adultery is pornography. Pornography is exceedingly common these days; our culture is shot through with pornographic images, and the pornographers want to entrap as many people as possible. So it's critical that men avoid this trap.

And, just to be blunt, wives should make every effort to make it unnecessary for husbands to seek pornography. A man who is satisfied at home with his wife doesn't go seeking that kind of thing elsewhere.

If the husband is accessing pornography, we don't blame the wife; it's not her fault; it's the man's fault. Use of pornography is fairly rare among women and fairly common among men, so men are usually at fault in this regard.

In any case, pornography should have no place in a Christian home and marriage. If pornography is an issue, you must take radical steps to eradicate it from your life. You don't want to be constantly guilty of adultery of the heart by lusting after other women.

Of course, you don't need pornography to be guilty of lust. Virtually any woman can be the object of lust. We must exercise self-control and not allow ourselves to engage in lust. We must prevent ourselves from engaging in adultery of the heart.

**BTW**, women can do things to help men not lust after them. One of the reasons that the Bible promotes modest dress is to reduce lust.

So there's a form of emotional or mental adultery that is based on lusting after another person.

- b) Emotional adultery may happen if a spouse becomes emotionally intimate with a person of the opposite sex who is not his spouse.

In this case, I would define emotional intimacy as experiencing the kind of emotional connection and dependence that spouses have with one another. If a man connects with a woman on a deep emotional level, then the potential exists for emotional adultery, because the man is sharing the kinds of things that he should share only with his wife. He is not being exclusive with his emotional attachments. He's allowing an intruder to share his deepest thoughts and feelings. This deep emotional connection should be exclusive to his wife/spouse alone.

If you are communicating with a woman, meeting with her, texting, emailing, messaging; if you are looking forward to these interactions; if you think of this person in deeply personal terms of affection and warmth, then you are clearly engaging in emotional adultery.

And emotional adultery can easily turn into physical adultery. Once you have given your heart, giving your body is the next logical step, and it often happens that way. Someone who never intended to engage in physical adultery does so because he has allowed himself to engage in emotional adultery. He gives over his heart first, then his body.

The physical act of adultery is far more significant than is emotional/mental adultery, but the two forms are often tightly connected.

If a wife finds out that her husband has had this kind of deeply personal, intimate emotional connection with another woman, it would be almost as traumatic as physical adultery would be.

4. Exclusivity in marriage means that married people do not seek or allow an emotional/mental connection with other people of the opposite sex. The primary relationship is the marriage, and no other close personal relationship with a person of the opposite sex will be allowed. Marriage is exclusive emotionally.

5. It doesn't mean that you can't have friends—even friends of the opposite sex. But it does mean that no friendship will take the place of the spouse. No friendship will have the same depth and personal intimacy as that one has with his spouse. The married relationship is kept restricted and set apart. Spouses are discreet and careful regarding other relationships; no other relationship is formed like the partnership of the two spouses.

**Trans:** If we want to avoid physical adultery, we must guard our hearts and minds. We must not engage in lust of the heart, and we must not allow emotional intimacy with a person of the opposite sex other than our spouse.

### III. Marriage fidelity is under threat.

One of the reasons I thought I should speak on this topic is the fact that marital fidelity is under threat. I suppose it always has been, but particularly these days, with our culture becoming ever more pornographic and our morals becoming ever more permissive and slack, it seems like adultery, even in the Christian community, is becoming more common.

It seems like every few months I hear about Christian leaders who shipwreck their lives through adultery. If it's happening among Christian leaders, I have no doubt that it's happening more broadly among Christians in general. So we need to be warned about this threat.

How is marriage fidelity under threat?

#### A. It's threatened by our own depravity.

1. The heart is sinful and desperately wicked (Jer 17:9). You don't know what you might be capable of doing given the right set of circumstances. We have the means within ourselves to ruin our lives through sin.
2. James tells us that we are “drawn away of [our] own lusts and enticed” (James 1:14). Our sinful hearts are naturally prone to lust, and it can easily draw us away if we allow it.

E.g., King David was a man after God's own heart, the sweet psalmist of Israel; yet given the right situation, he committed adultery and murder.

David had several wives and concubines. Had he wanted the companionship of a woman, there were plenty available to him at his beck and call. I imagine his wives and concubines were all very attractive women. Yet that was not enough for him; his lust drew him to violate one of the most basic moral principles—thou shalt not commit adultery.

3. That shows us that, even if we are saved, we are still capable of great sin.

**Illus.:** I recently heard about a man who was both a pastor and a marriage counselor who allegedly committed adultery with a woman he was counseling. They began by talking regularly on the phone, but it escalated to adultery (allegedly). And that led to divorce. Uncontrolled lust led to disaster.

I suspect that emotional intimacy led step by step to physical intimacy. And these were both professing Christians.

You'd think that a pastor who does marriage counseling would be immune from the sin of adultery, but apparently not.

Lust in the human heart is very strong, and given the right circumstances, and provided the right opportunities, infidelity could be a major threat, even to those who should be strong in the faith.

B. It's threatened by the culture.

1. We live in a very licentious world. Multiple voices tell us that we should be free to explore any and all relationship that we might enjoy. There should be no limits on our behavior. Don't suppress your emotions. You don't need to follow old fashioned rules.
2. And people often assume that their own sense of personal happiness is what matters most. I must be true to my own feelings; I must be my authentic self. If I follow my own feelings, and that leads to adultery, and that makes me happy, then that's what I'm going to do. Many people today take that approach to life. It's common in the culture.
3. To stand *for* biblical morality today is to stand *against* the culture. These days we have to go against the current, we must be counter-cultural if we are to maintain biblical values.



C. It's threatened by technology.

1. Today, with a click of a mouse or a tap on a screen, you can form relationships with others around the world. Thousands of people would be happy to chat with you and potentially form a relationship with you. Immoral content on the Internet is very common and easy to find.
2. It's impossible to know all the ways modern technology aids and facilitates immoral relationships. How many people commit adultery because they rekindle an old romance through a Facebook contact? How many people are drawn into websites whose purpose is to connect willing participants? If we allow it, technology is a serious threat to marital fidelity.

**Trans:** So there are both internal and external threats that we must be aware of and avoid.

IV. How to preserve marital fidelity

- A. Walk with God in sincere faith and commitment. People who have a vibrant relationship with God don't commit adultery. If your relationship with God is what it should be, adultery will not be a threat. Don't neglect your relationship with God. Have your daily devotions. Faithfully attend church. Confess your sins regularly and pursue holiness. Control yourself. If you are faithfully walking with God and engaging in the disciplines of the Christian life, adultery will not be much of a threat.
- B. Remain faithful to your commitments to your spouse. You made a solemn oath and took vows to be faithful to your spouse. If you love your wife like Christ loves the church, adultery will not be much of a threat. If you respect your husband, adultery will not be much of a threat.
- C. Avoid potential entanglements.
  1. With pornography and smutty entertainment

Job 31:1–4 1 *"I have made a covenant with my eyes; Why then should I look [with lust] upon a young woman? ... [Does not God promise] destruction for the wicked, And disaster for the workers of iniquity? 4 Does He not see my ways, And count all my steps?*

If you have been committing mental adultery, either through pornography or simply through lusting after other women, you must put that to an immediate stop. You can't expect to maintain a good relationship with your spouse if you are regularly committing emotional adultery.

I would suggest imposing filters and restrictions on your internet. Get rid of cable or satellite TV if that's the source of the problem.

Remember that Jesus said

*Mt 5:30 If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell.*

You may need to take radical steps to prevent yourself from giving in to temptation. There are some good resources available for those who are struggling in this area.

2. With other individuals

a) Don't allow your relationships with others to develop to the point of emotional intimacy. Don't share with others what you should share only with your spouse.

b) Don't put yourself in a position where you might give in to temptation. Avoid potentially compromising situations.

**Illus.:** You may remember that former VP Mike Pence stirred up some controversy a while back when he said that he would not meet with women privately. He would always have at least one other person present when he met with a woman. That is a good policy to follow.

c) And if you are guilty of actual physical adultery, you must immediately quit that behavior and repent of it. Adultery is a soul-damning sin, and you cannot participate in it and still think of yourself as a Christian.

*Proverbs 5:15–18 15 Drink water from your own cistern, And running water from your own well. 16 Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? 17 Let them be only your own, And not for strangers with you. 18 Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice with the wife of your youth.*

For Christians, fidelity in marriage should not be an issue; marital infidelity should not even exist among those professing to be followers of Christ. And yet we know that adultery happens even among believers. If King David could be guilty of it, then others could be guilty of it as well.

The Bible denounces adultery in the strongest of terms. Those who persist unrepentantly in adultery can have no hope of heaven; it is a soul-damning sin that we must avoid at all costs. It's a sin that often destroys families and seriously harms children.

If you are in any way guilty of marital infidelity, you must immediately repent of that dreadful sin, turn from your wicked ways, and put restrictions into place to prevent it from happening again. You need to be willing to take radical steps to avoid engaging in that kind of behavior again.

God's expectation is that spouses cleave to one another in a monogamous, exclusive, life-long covenant of marriage. God expects you to be a one-woman man or a one-man woman. We should not allow anything into our lives that threatens marital fidelity.