

The Sermon on the Mount, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: Purity in a Sensual Age

Matthew 5:27-30

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally, this lesson teaches that God holds us accountable not only for sexual acts but for the desires of the heart and the life of the imagination. Jesus locates adultery in the cultivated lustful look, not merely in the bed, which means that purity is a matter of the inner person before it is ever a matter of behavior. It also teaches, through deliberately shocking language, that sexual sin is serious enough to bear on our eternal destiny, and therefore demands radical, decisive action rather than negotiation. These are countercultural claims in an age that treats lust as harmless and self-denial as repression.

You will need to teach this with unusual care, because no subject is more saturated with shame, secrecy, and woundedness in a typical class. Some of your students are quietly struggling with pornography or fantasy; some carry the scars of past sexual sin, their own or others' against them. The aim is to handle Jesus' severity without crushing, and his grace without softening the standard. Do not wink at the sin, and do not pile on the despair. Hold up both the holiness God requires and the cleansing God provides.

So aim at three things with your class. First, restore a healthy seriousness about a sin our culture trivializes, taking Jesus' urgency at face value. Second, move purity from mere behavior management to the deeper work of a heart that belongs wholly to Christ, since a blind man can still lust. Third, anchor the whole lesson in the gospel, so that students leave neither presuming on grace nor drowning in shame, but trusting the Christ who both forgives the impure and is able to make them new. Keep the tone that of a physician, not a prosecutor.

Question 1

Student Question:

Jesus says that lustful intent is already a form of adultery "in the heart" (v. 28). What does this teach about the difference between temptation and the cultivated desire Jesus condemns, and why does God hold us accountable for the life of our imagination?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by distinguishing carefully between temptation and the sin Jesus names, because if you blur them you will needlessly crush sensitive consciences. Jesus condemns looking "with lustful intent," the deliberate, cultivated, willing gaze that feeds desire and welcomes it. A first, involuntary pull of temptation is not yet this sin; even Jesus was tempted, yet without sin

(Hebrews 4:15). The sin lies in the lingering, the inviting, the feeding of the desire once it appears.

Teach that God holds us accountable for the life of the imagination because that is where we actually live. Out of the heart come the issues of life, and Jesus consistently locates moral defilement there (Matthew 15:18–19). Our private fantasies are not a victimless inner theater; they shape who we are becoming, train our desires, and reveal what we truly worship. God is not indifferent to the inner person; he is its rightful Lord.

Help students see why this is, in a strange way, dignifying rather than oppressive. The world says the inner life is nobody's business and means nothing as long as you act decently. Jesus says your inner life matters infinitely, that you are a whole person before God, and that he cares about who you are when no one is watching. He takes your heart seriously because he wants all of you, not just your behavior.

Apply this to the lustful look specifically, but be careful to keep the principle broad. This is not only a male struggle, nor only about explicit images; it includes the cultivated fantasy, the emotional indulgence, the comparison and coveting that the heart entertains. The call is to a purity that reaches all the way into the imagination, where God alone fully sees.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between involuntary temptation and cultivated lustful intent (Hebrews 4:15)
- God's rightful lordship over the inner life and the imagination
- The heart as the source of moral defilement (Matthew 15:18–19)
- Fantasy as formative, training our desires and revealing our worship
- Purity as a matter of the whole person, not only outward acts

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between being tempted and the lust Jesus condemns?
- Why does God hold us accountable for what happens in our imagination?
- How is Jesus' concern for your inner life actually a sign of how much he values you?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest with yourself about your own eyes and imagination. Where have you been telling yourself that a "harmless" look or fantasy costs nothing, and how does Jesus' teaching challenge that story?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question targets the lie that a harmless look or private fantasy costs nothing. Almost everyone has rehearsed some version of this story: it is just looking, it is not hurting anyone, everyone does it. The first work is to expose that story as false, gently but plainly.

Help students trace the actual costs they have learned to ignore: the way indulged lust trains the heart to treat people as objects, erodes contentment and gratitude, dims spiritual hunger, and quietly builds patterns that grow stronger with each feeding. What feels like a small private indulgence is laying tracks the soul will run on later.

Invite honest self-examination without spiraling into shame. The goal is not to manufacture a sense of filth but to let the truth of Jesus' words replace the comfortable fiction. Encourage students to name, at least before God, where they have been telling themselves the look is free, and to begin counting the real cost.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Exposing the lie that lustful looking is harmless
- The hidden costs: objectifying others, eroding contentment, dimming spiritual hunger
- Indulged desire building patterns that strengthen over time
- Honest self-examination without descent into shame

Discussion Prompts

- What story have you told yourself to make a lustful look feel harmless?
- What does indulged lust actually cost you over time?
- How does Jesus' teaching challenge that story?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus uses deliberately shocking images, tearing out an eye, cutting off a hand (v. 29–30). Since a blind person can still lust, what is Jesus really calling for, and what does the severity of his language reveal about the seriousness of sexual sin?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Make clear at once that Jesus is using hyperbole, vivid exaggeration to make a point, not commanding literal self-mutilation. The proof is in the logic: a man who tears out one eye can still lust with the other, and a blind man can lust without any eyes at all. The problem is never finally the eye or the hand; it is the heart that drives them. Jesus knows this, and so the command is figurative.

But do not let the recognition of hyperbole drain the seriousness away, which is the usual mistake. The figure is shocking on purpose. Jesus is saying that purity is worth radical, costly, decisive action, that we should be willing to part with anything, however valuable or near to us,

that keeps drawing us into sin. If we would cut off a hand to save our life, we should be at least that ruthless with whatever leads us into sexual sin.

Translate the principle into concrete categories your class can grasp. The eye and the hand stand for things that may be good or neutral in themselves but have become doorways to sin for us: a device, an app, a streaming service, a friendship that has turned, a habit of being alone with a screen late at night. Jesus calls for decisive removal, not cautious management, of whatever repeatedly trips us.

Underline the cost. Cutting off a hand hurts; so does this. Real repentance in this area usually costs us something we would rather keep, some convenience, some pleasure, some relationship. Jesus' language prepares us for that cost and tells us it is worth paying. Half-measures in the war for purity are usually defeats in disguise.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Jesus' language as hyperbole, not a command to literal mutilation
- The heart, not the eye or hand, as the true source of sin
- Purity as worth radical, costly, decisive action
- Removing the doorways to sin rather than merely managing them
- The real cost of repentance in this area

Discussion Prompts

- How do we know Jesus is not commanding literal self-harm here?
- What does the severity of his language tell us about how serious this sin is?
- What is the difference between decisively cutting something off and cautiously managing it?

Question 4

Student Question:

Think about the specific "eyes" and "hands" in your life, the apps, accounts, screens, or relationships that repeatedly become doorways to temptation. What would radical, decisive action look like for you, and what have you been unwilling to cut off?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks students to identify their specific eyes and hands, the concrete doorways through which temptation repeatedly comes. The aim is to move from agreeing with the principle to naming the actual app, account, screen, or relationship that keeps tripping them.

Be prepared for the resistance that always surrounds this step, because the eye and the hand are valuable; that is the whole point of the image. The phone that is a doorway to temptation is also how we stay in touch with family. The streaming service is also entertainment we enjoy. Jesus knew the cost when he spoke of an eye and a hand. Help students count it honestly.

Press toward one decisive, doable step rather than a vague intention to do better. Installing accountability software, removing an app, ending a compromising relationship, changing where and when devices are used. Encourage specificity, because purity is usually won or lost in concrete, unglamorous decisions, not in good intentions.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Naming the specific doorways to temptation in one's life
- Reckoning honestly with the value of what may need to be cut off
- Decisive, concrete steps over vague intentions
- Practical tools and boundaries as means of obedience

Discussion Prompts

- What are the specific "eyes" and "hands" that keep becoming doorways to sin for you?
- What have you been unwilling to cut off because it costs too much?
- What is one decisive step you could take this week?

Question 5

Student Question:

Jesus warns that it is better to lose a part of the body than for the "whole body to be thrown into hell" (v. 29-30). Why does Jesus connect unchecked sexual sin to such serious eternal consequences, and how does this guard us against treating it as a minor matter?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Do not soften the eternal language Jesus uses. Twice he says it is better to lose a part of the body than for the whole body to be thrown into hell. Jesus, the most loving teacher who ever lived, speaks more about judgment than almost anyone in Scripture, precisely because he loves us and will not let us sleepwalk toward ruin. Sexual sin, indulged and unrepented, is not a minor blemish; it can be a road that leads away from God entirely.

Teach why this sin in particular carries such weight. It is uniquely entangling, uniquely deceptive, and uniquely able to enslave. Paul says the sexually immoral sins against his own body in a way other sins do not (1 Corinthians 6:18), and he lists sexual immorality among the works of the flesh that, practiced unrepentantly, keep people from inheriting the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21; Ephesians 5:5). This is sober biblical teaching, not Victorian squeamishness.

At the same time, guard against the despair this language can produce in the tender-hearted. Jesus' warning is not a verdict already passed on the struggler; it is a loving alarm meant to drive us to radical repentance and to Christ. The point of warning a man about a cliff is to keep him from falling, not to push him off. Hold the warning and the hope together.

Apply this against the cultural assumption that God grades sexual sin on a curve, that a little is expected and harmless. Jesus' words shatter that assumption. He treats this as a life-and-death matter, and so should we, not with panic, but with the seriousness that drives us to decisive action and to the Savior.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The reality of eternal judgment, taught by the most loving of teachers
- Unrepentant sexual sin among the works of the flesh that bar the kingdom (Galatians 5:19–21; Ephesians 5:5)
- The uniquely entangling and enslaving nature of sexual sin (1 Corinthians 6:18)
- Warning as an act of love meant to drive us to repentance, not despair
- Rejecting the cultural assumption that God grades this sin on a curve

Discussion Prompts

- Why would Jesus connect unchecked sexual sin to such serious consequences?
- How is a stern warning about danger actually an expression of love?
- Where have you assumed God grades sexual purity on a curve?

Question 6

Student Question:

Where have you been treating sexual purity as an area where God grades on a curve, assuming a little compromise is no real danger? What would change if you took Jesus' warning here at face value?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question presses students to examine whether they have quietly exempted this area from real obedience. Many believers who would never tolerate dishonesty or cruelty in themselves treat their sexual compromises as understandable, even inevitable. The question asks them to bring that double standard into the light.

Help them see how the exemption works. We tell ourselves that everyone struggles here, that the culture makes it impossible, that God surely understands, and so we settle into a low-grade tolerance of sin we would never accept elsewhere. Jesus' warning is meant to dismantle exactly this complacency.

Invite a concrete reckoning. What would actually change in their habits, their devices, their evenings, their thought-life, if they took Jesus' words here at full face value rather than at a comfortable discount? The aim is not fresh shame but a recovered seriousness that leads to real change.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Examining the double standard that exempts sexual sin from real obedience
- The excuses culture supplies for tolerating this sin
- Recovering seriousness without descending into shame
- Concrete change as the fruit of taking Jesus at his word

Discussion Prompts

- Where have you treated sexual purity as an area where God grades on a curve?
- What excuses have you accepted that you would reject in any other area of obedience?
- What would change if you took Jesus' warning here at face value?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus speaks of the eye and the hand "causing" us to sin, locating the problem not in the body itself but in the heart that uses them (v. 29–30). How does true purity go deeper than merely avoiding certain acts, and what does it mean to be pure in heart and not just in behavior?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Return to the truth that the eye and the hand only cause sin because of the heart behind them. This means that true purity can never be merely the absence of certain acts. A person can avoid every external sin and remain inwardly enslaved to lust, fantasy, and the habit of treating others as objects. The greater righteousness Jesus described reaches all the way down here too.

Teach the positive vision, because purity is too often presented only as avoidance. Jesus blessed the pure in heart, the single-minded, undivided heart that loves God and sees other people as persons rather than as means to gratification. Purity is not just the suppression of bad desire; it is the cultivation of a heart so captivated by God that lesser appetites lose their grip.

Show why behavior management alone eventually fails. White-knuckled restraint that never touches the heart tends to oscillate between rigid control and sudden collapse, because the underlying desire is never reordered, only repressed. Lasting change comes as the heart's loves are retrained, as God becomes more satisfying than the sin, and as we starve the old appetite and feed the new.

Point to the means God gives for tending the heart: his word, prayer, honest fellowship and confession with trusted believers (James 5:16), the regular worship and the Lord's Supper that re-center us on Christ. Purity grows in a heart that is being filled with something better, not merely scraped clean and left empty, which Jesus warned is a dangerous state (Matthew 12:43–45).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Purity as a matter of the heart, not merely the absence of acts

- The pure heart as single-minded love for God (Matthew 5:8)
- The failure of mere behavior management and white-knuckled repression
- Reordering the heart's loves so God becomes more satisfying than the sin
- Means of grace for tending the heart: word, prayer, confession, worship (James 5:16)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is avoiding certain acts not the same as being pure in heart?
- What does it mean to cultivate a pure heart, not just suppress a bad one?
- Why does white-knuckled restraint eventually fail without a change of heart?

Question 8

Student Question:

Think about whether your strategy for purity has been mostly about managing behavior or about tending your heart. What is one way you could pursue a pure heart this week, and not just an unstained record?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question asks students to evaluate their own strategy for purity. Many have only ever tried behavior management, building walls and setting rules, which are good and necessary but insufficient by themselves. The question gently exposes whether they have neglected the heart while guarding the hands.

Help them imagine what tending the heart looks like in practice, alongside the boundaries: feeding on Scripture and prayer, bringing the struggle into the light with a trusted brother or sister rather than fighting in isolation, asking God to make himself more desirable than the sin, cultivating gratitude and contentment that starve covetous desire.

Aim for one heart-level practice this week, not just one more rule. Perhaps an honest conversation with a trusted believer, a daily prayer that names the struggle, a habit of thanksgiving when temptation comes. The boundaries matter, but the heart is the battlefield, and it must be tended, not just fenced.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Evaluating whether one's strategy tends the heart or only manages behavior
- Boundaries as necessary but insufficient by themselves
- Fighting in the light through confession rather than in isolation
- Heart-level practices that retrain desire

Discussion Prompts

- Has your pursuit of purity been mostly about behavior or about your heart?

- What would tending your heart, not just guarding your hands, look like?
- What is one heart-level practice you could begin this week?

Question 9

Student Question:

Sexual sin is the area where many believers feel the deepest shame and the greatest sense of being beyond help. How does the gospel speak to both the seriousness of this sin and the hope of cleansing and transformation, so that the call to purity is neither a hopeless burden nor a license to keep sinning? Ground your answer in what Christ has done for sinners.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the pastoral and doctrinal heart of the lesson, and you must hold two truths together without letting go of either. The first is the seriousness of sexual sin, which the whole passage has pressed. The second is the depth of the gospel's grace for exactly this sin. If you preach only the first, you crush the struggler into hopeless shame; if you preach only the second, you turn grace into permission. The gospel holds both.

Establish the seriousness honestly: this sin really does defile, enslave, and, unrepented, imperil the soul. But then establish the hope just as firmly, because Scripture does. Paul lists the sexually immoral, adulterers, and the like among those who will not inherit the kingdom, and then says to the Corinthians, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 6:9–11). The very people enslaved to this sin were washed clean. No one is beyond that washing.

Make the cleansing concrete in the gospel. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, and if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse (1 John 1:7–9). David, after grievous sexual sin, did not hide but cried out for a clean heart and a renewed spirit, and God restored him (Psalm 51). The door back to God is never barred for the one who comes in honest repentance.

Then speak of transformation, not only forgiveness, because the gospel offers both. Grace not only pardons the past; it trains us to renounce ungodliness and to live self-controlled lives (Titus 2:11–12). The Spirit produces self-control as real fruit (Galatians 5:22–23). The call to purity is not a demand to clean ourselves up by willpower, but an invitation into a transforming relationship with the Christ who both forgives the impure and remakes them.

Close by addressing the shame directly, because shame is what keeps so many trapped. Shame says, you are too far gone, hide, do not let anyone know. The gospel says, come into the light, where the blood of Jesus cleanses and the fellowship of the saints can help carry you (1 John 1:7). Tell your class plainly: there is no sexual sin so deep that the cross does not reach deeper, and no struggler so entangled that Christ cannot set them free. The call to purity is not a hopeless burden but the invitation of a Savior who delights to make the impure clean.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Holding together the seriousness of sexual sin and the depth of gospel grace
- The washing of even the sexually enslaved in Christ (1 Corinthians 6:9–11)
- Cleansing and forgiveness through the blood of Jesus and honest confession (1 John 1:7–9; Psalm 51)
- Grace as transforming power, not merely pardon (Titus 2:11–12; Galatians 5:22–23)
- Bringing sin into the light as the answer to shame, not hiding in it

Discussion Prompts

- How does the gospel take this sin seriously without leaving us in despair?
- What does “and such were some of you, but you were washed” mean for someone who feels beyond help?
- Why is bringing this struggle into the light the opposite of what shame tells us to do?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back over the whole passage. Jesus has reached into the most private region of your life with both severity and love. Where is he calling you to decisive action, and what is one specific, concrete step you will take this week to pursue purity of heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The capstone asks for one specific, concrete step toward purity of heart this week. After a lesson that has been both severe and tender, this question keeps the response personal and actionable rather than leaving students with vague conviction.

Help them choose a step that addresses both the hand and the heart: perhaps a decisive boundary (the cut-off hand) paired with a heart practice (confession to a trusted believer, daily prayer, feeding on Scripture). The most durable steps usually combine removing a doorway to sin with filling the heart with something better.

Close with the gospel firmly in view. They pursue purity not to earn God’s love but as those already loved and being cleansed by Christ. Send them home with both the seriousness and the hope intact, knowing that the Savior who calls them to radical purity is the same Savior who supplies the grace to walk in it, one honest step at a time.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- One concrete step that addresses both behavior and heart
- Pairing a decisive boundary with a heart-level practice
- Pursuing purity as the already-loved, not to earn love
- Holding seriousness and hope together in the response

Discussion Prompts

- Where is Jesus calling you to decisive action in this area?
- What one concrete step, for both your hands and your heart, will you take this week?
- How does resting in Christ's love change the way you pursue purity?