

## **REAL DEVOTION: *Jesus Rejects Superficial Religion***

**Matthew 15:1-11,16-20**

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### **UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT**

#### **Where Are We in Matthew?**

By the time we reach **Matthew 15**, Jesus' ministry is gaining serious attention. Crowds are following Him. Miracles are happening. Lives are changing. But not everyone is celebrating.

Religious leaders (specifically the Pharisees and scribes from Jerusalem) show up to question Jesus. They aren't coming to learn. They're coming to trap Him.

The issue?

#### **Tradition vs. True Devotion.**

The Pharisees had built layers of man-made religious rules around God's law. They looked holy. They acted spiritual. But their hearts were far from God.

Matthew 15 is Jesus pulling the mask off superficial religion and if we're honest... This chapter hits close to home.

Because you can:

- Go to church
- Post Bible verses
- Raise your hands in worship
- Call yourself a Christian

...and still have a heart far from Jesus.

## EXPLORE THE TEXT

### 1. Tradition (v.2)

Not Scripture but human rules passed down. Traditions aren't bad... unless they replace God's unchanging Word and true obedience. (This challenges us to evaluate what we prioritize in our faith.)

### 2. Transgress (v.3)

Means to break or violate God's command. Jesus flips the accusation the Pharisees make against the disciples, but He says *they* are the ones breaking God's law. (Jesus exposes their hypocrisy and reminds us to obey God above all.)

### 3. Hypocrites (v.7)

Originally meant "actor" — Someone wearing a mask on stage. Jesus says they are performing spirituality, pretending to be righteous. (He's warning us that we can sometimes do the same, pretending to be spiritual when our hearts aren't truly engaged.)

### 4. In Vain (v.9)

Means empty, useless, meaningless. Worship that doesn't come from the heart is wasted. (This challenges us to check if our worship is truly meaningful or just going through the motions.)

### 5. Defile (v.11)

To make unclean. The Pharisees were obsessed with external cleanliness. Jesus says the real issue is internal corruption, not what you touch or eat. (This shifts our focus from outward rules to inward purity.)

### 6. Heart (v.18-19)

In Scripture, the heart isn't just that muscle pumping blood. Think of it as your inner operating system, or the 'command center' of your entire life – where your thoughts, desires, and deepest motives are. Real devotion starts there. (Everything we think, say, and do flows from here.)

## **DAY 1 — The Tradition Trap - Matthew 15:1–2**

The Pharisees weren't upset about sin. They were upset about handwashing.

Now pause.

This wasn't about hygiene. It was about a religious ceremony. They had created extra rules to prove how spiritual they were. And sometimes we do the same thing.

We think:

- "I go to church, so I'm good."
- "I don't cuss like they do."
- "I post Christian content."

But Jesus isn't impressed by religious performance. He cares about your heart. You can look clean on the outside and still be spiritually empty inside.

God isn't asking for tradition. He's asking for transformation.

### **Supporting Verse**

**1 Samuel 16:7 – 7** But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."

### **Application**

What "religious habits" might you be relying on instead of actually walking with Jesus?

### **Challenge**

Pray this today:

"Jesus, show me where I'm performing instead of pursuing You."

## **DAY 2 — When Rules Replace Relationship - Matthew 15:3–6**

Jesus flips the script.

They accuse Him. He exposes them.

The Pharisees created loopholes so they didn't have to financially support their parents, even though God's clear and unchanging Word clearly commanded them to honor father and mother. They used religion to avoid obedience.

That's dangerous.

It's possible to know the Bible...And still not obey it.

You can:

- Know worship lyrics
- Memorize verses
- Lead prayer

And still ignore what God clearly says. Real devotion obeys even when it costs.

### **Supporting Verse**

**James 1:22** – Be doers of the word, and not hearers only.

### **Application**

Is there something God has clearly told you to do... that you're avoiding?

### **Challenge**

Obey one specific thing today that you've been putting off.

## **DAY 3 — Worship That's Wasted - Matthew 15:7-9**

### **Devotional**

This one hurts.

You can sing worship songs. You can say the right Christian phrases. You can pray out loud. And your heart still be far away.

Jesus calls that worship "in vain."

Empty.

Pointless.

Wasted.

Worship isn't about volume. It's about sincerity. God doesn't want lip service. He wants your life.

**Psalm 51:17** – The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

### **Application**

When you worship, are you thinking about the words? Or just singing?

### **Challenge**

Next time you worship, focus deeply on every word.

## **DAY 4 — The Real Problem Isn't Outside - Matthew 15:10–11**

### **Devotional**

The Pharisees were obsessed with what went into the body. Jesus says the problem is what comes out. Your words reveal your heart.

Think about it:

- Gossip
- Anger
- Sexual jokes
- Lying
- Complaining

Those don't come from bad friends. They don't come from bad music. They come from inside. Your mouth exposes what's ruling your heart. And only Jesus can clean that.

### **Supporting Verse**

**Luke 6:45** – The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

### **Application**

What do your words say about what's inside you?

### **Challenge**

Go one full day without tearing someone down with your words.

## **DAY 5 — The Heart Check - Matthew 15:16–20**

### **Devotional**

Jesus goes deeper. He lists sins, not to shame people, but to show the root. The issue isn't behavior modification. It's heart transformation.

Religion says:

“Try harder.”

Jesus says:

“You need a new heart.”

That's the Gospel.

You can't clean yourself up enough.

You can't perform well enough.

You can't behave your way into holiness.

But Jesus can give you a new heart.

### **Supporting Verse**

**Ezekiel 36:26** – And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

### **Application**

Have you asked Jesus to change your heart, not just your habits?

### **Challenge**

Pray Psalm 139:23–24 today:

“Search me, O God... and lead me in the way everlasting.”

## **FINAL THOUGHT**

Matthew 15 is clear: Jesus rejects superficial religion.

He isn't impressed by: Perfect church attendance, Religious routines, Spiritual performance...He wants your heart.

Real devotion isn't loud. It isn't flashy. It isn't performative.

It's surrendered.

As you finish this week, remember Jesus isn't looking for a performance;

He's longing for your heart. Take a moment to pray:

*"Lord Jesus, thank you for loving me enough to want my whole heart.*

*Search me, know me,*