

# The Gospel of Matthew: They Do Not Wash

Discussion Guide for February 28 and March 1, 2026

## **Summary**

This week's message explores Matthew 15:1–20 and Jesus' confrontation with the Pharisees and scribes over ritual handwashing. Religious leaders from Jerusalem challenge Jesus because His disciples do not follow the "tradition of the elders." But Jesus exposes the deeper issue: they are elevating human tradition above the Word of God. He calls out their hypocrisy, quoting Isaiah to reveal that outward worship without a transformed heart is empty.

Jesus then teaches the crowd that true defilement does not come from what enters the mouth, but from what comes out of the heart. Sin originates internally, and that is what makes a person spiritually unclean. This passage reminds us that God is not primarily concerned with external religious performance but with inward transformation. True spiritual cleanliness comes from the inside out, and only God can give us a new heart.

## **Ice Breaker**

Have you ever followed a rule or tradition simply because "that's how it's always been done," even though you didn't fully understand why? What was that experience like?

## **Key Verses**

1. Matthew 15:1-20
2. Isaiah 29:13
3. 1 John 1:7
4. Ezekiel 36:26

## **Discussion Questions**

1. The Pharisees were more concerned about tradition than about God's commandments. Why is it so easy for religious traditions to become more important than Scripture?
2. Jesus accuses the religious leaders of honoring God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him. What are some ways this disconnect can show up in our lives today?
3. Jesus says that what comes out of a person's mouth reveals the condition of their heart. What does your speech (especially in stressful or frustrating moments) reveal about what is happening inside you?
4. The religious leaders are described as "blind guides." Why is spiritual leadership such a serious responsibility? How should this truth shape the way we lead others—whether in our families, church, or community?
5. Jesus teaches that sin originates in the heart. Why is it easier to modify external behavior than to address internal attitudes and desires?

### **Life Application**

This week, don't just manage behavior — examine your heart. When you feel anger, impatience, pride, or bitterness rise up, stop and ask: What's going on inside me? Instead of excusing it, bring it to God and ask Him to change the root, not just the reaction. Then take one clear step — apologize, confess, forgive, or replace a negative thought with truth. Real transformation starts beneath the surface.

### **Key Takeaways**

- 1.** Religious tradition should never replace God's Word.
- 2.** Outward worship without inward transformation is empty.
- 3.** Spiritual leaders carry significant responsibility before God.
- 4.** Sin originates in the heart, not in external circumstances.
- 5.** Only God can cleanse and transform us from the inside out.