

# Under the Microscope: Sermon Summary

## (Matthew 15:1–20)

Riley Neal / Fellowship Church / Feb 15, 2026

### Intro

Human beings have a complicated relationship with rules: we both rely on rules for order and resent them when they become oppressive or misused.

Illustration: often, the villains that get under our skin the most are those who twist the rules to hurt people (Dolores Umbridge).

**Diagnostic:** do you identify more as a rule-follower (tempted to trust rules for righteousness) or a rule breaker (tempted to see all rules as harmful)? How does this impact how you interact with your faith?

Whether you are a rule follower or rule-breaker, Jesus' teaching offers good news: God desires to do something in us that goes deeper than external conformity to the rules—because **man-made rules cannot take the place of a transformed heart.**

### Part 1: Human traditions vs. God's commandments (15:1–6)

The Pharisees criticize Jesus' disciples for not following ritual handwashing traditions. Jesus responds by exposing how their human traditions (like the Corban vow) actually undermine God's commands, such as honoring one's parents.

**Takeaway:** Human traditions become dangerous when they override or replace God's Word.

### Part 2: Twisted Laws Reveal Twisted Hearts (15:7–9)

Quoting Isaiah, Jesus calls the Pharisees hypocrites who honor God outwardly but not inwardly. Their misuse of rules exposes a deeper issue: their hearts are far from God.

Illustration: laws function less like a *cure* for sin and more like a *quarantine*—they might prevent some consequences, but they cannot cure the inner problem.

**Takeaway:** The real problem is not rules themselves but the sinful human heart that either rejects or manipulates them. Rules can restrain behavior but cannot cure inner corruption.

### Part 3: External vs. Internal Defilement (15:10–20)

Jesus makes a radical claim: what defiles a person is not what enters the body, but what comes out of the heart—evil thoughts, actions, and desires. He shifts the focus from ceremonial purity to moral and spiritual reality.

**Takeaway:** Spiritual health should not be measured merely by outward behaviors (Bible reading, rule-following), but by heart-level transformation—love, humility, repentance, and desire for God.

**Diagnostic:** Which questions from Don Whitney's *Ten Questions to Diagnose your Spiritual Health* are helpful or convicting for you in examining your own heart?

- Do you thirst for God?
- Are you more loving?
- Do you have a growing concern for the spiritual and temporal needs of others?
- Do you delight in the bride of Jesus Christ (=the Church)?
- Do you still grieve over sin?
- Are you a quick forgiver?
- Do you yearn for heaven?

### Matthew 15 and the Gospel

Jesus' ultimate goal is not to make our rigid, external checklist into a more rigid, internal checklist. Instead, he wants to point us to the inner renewal offered by God in the New Covenant. Jesus is not calling people to fix themselves through better rules, but to receive a new heart.

**Takeaway:** when you look inward and find mixed motives and a heart that still needs work, take what you find and bring it *to the cross for cleansing and to the Holy Spirit for transformation.*