

Lessons From the Pharisees

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Let me ask a question, starting off: Why do the gospels record in such detail—Christ's correction of the Pharisees? Think about it; it's all through the gospels. In Matthew 23 alone—just one chapter—Christ called the Pharisees hypocrites, blind guides, fools, whitened sepulchers, serpents, a generation of vipers and the last one, children of hell. Which one of us would like Christ to refer to us in those terms? Is that what we want our legacy to be; condemnation like that? So we have to ask the question, what was it about the Pharisees that prompted Christ to go after them so vehemently? Why was it recorded so often in scripture and in such detail? You have to ask the question.

We know God's word is for our instruction today. 2 Timothy 3:16, it is for us today—for our instruction today. So therefore, since the gospels are filled with Christ's condemnation of the Pharisees, there must be lessons that we have to learn today. It's not a history lesson, it's for us today. Could it be—just posing a question, we all have to answer for ourselves—that the pharisaical movement is alive today in God's church? Is that a possibility? Could it be that God is warning us to avoid becoming modern day Pharisees so that we can avoid Christ's condemnation because none of us wants to be condemned like that? To answer that question, it's only logical that we should know what a Pharisee is, so we can avoid being one. So the title of the sermon is:

Lessons From the Pharisees

In the first part of the sermon, what we're going to do is cover a brief history of the Pharisaical movement. You can study it in detail on your own—I'm just going to hit the high spots. The pharisaical movement slowly began in the 500's B.C. Over the decades, a group of lay teachers began to grow in influence in the Jewish community. They did so because the priesthood began to be more and more corrupted. As we know, nature abhors a vacuum and these lay teachers began to supplant in the people's mind, in many cases, the priesthood. The Zondervan Bible Dictionary under the term pharisees—the subject pharisees—on page 647 says: *The name pharisee which in its Semitic form means, the separated ones.*

Josephus in his History of the Jews, says: The pharisees were “a body of Jews who profess to be more religious than the rest, and to explain the law more precisely.” The Hastings Bible Dictionary on page 719 under the subject of pharisees says: *Into the place of the prophet was gradually replaced by a school master and a drill master.* (Referring to the pharisees). Scholarly wrote repeat, drill master and school master. Before Christ came to this earth, the Greek culture was very entrenched in the whole Mediterranean area including the Jewish lands that they occupied at the time. It was very entrenched in the Jewish culture and it influenced language, it influenced the mode of dress and it influenced education. Just as it does in the west today. Our model of education comes from the Greeks. It especially had an influence on Jewish philosophy.

Before I started studying this, I didn't realize the extent that Greek culture had affected Jewish philosophy. Over the years, the Jews actually adopted many aspects of Greek philosophy. Let me quote from The Jewish Virtual Library: *Pharisees believed in selective Hellenism such as the immortality of the soul*. Hellenism comes from the Greek word, hellenismos which means, speak Greek or make Greek. The Jewish Virtual Library says the pharisees believed in selective Hellenism—Greek philosophy. They picked and chose, but it infiltrated Jewish philosophy.

The obvious problem of course, is these Greek philosophies and Greek practices couldn't be found in the Old Testament law—obviously could not be found in the Old Testament law. Let me read from the book Talmud and Apocrypha by a man named Hereford on page 66. He notes this—it's important—he said: *The difficulty was to find a sanction in the Torah (the first five books in the Old Testament) for the new customs and practices which had established themselves in the community*. How do you justify that scripturally? It's similar to what the Catholic leaders dealt with when they adopted pagan celebrations and brought them into the church; like sun worship, Christmas trees, yule logs and all of that. How can you justify that scripturally? So the pharisees were faced with this problem.

They developed two solutions. Number one—the simplest solution—is to teach that many of these Greek customs were actually of Jewish origin. That can solve a problem. Let me read from the book Rabbinic Essays by an author named Lauterbach, on page 211 he says: *They [referring to the Pharisees] reason this: [listen to the human reasoning] It is hardly possible that foreign customs and non-Jewish laws should have met with such universal acceptance. [So, they can't be foreign if all the people accept them.] The total absence of objection on the part of the people to such customs vouched for their Jewish origin in the opinion of the teachers [referring to the pharisees].* In other words these pharisees called these Greek philosophies and some of these Greek customs the tradition of the fathers. They've been handed down generation to generation as a tradition and we're going to see how they verify that in the second point—second thing they did.

The pharisees claimed that these customs were handed down orally from Moses. Not written down but orally. Such as the immortality of the soul—not found in the Bible, but they were handed down orally from Moses to generation to generation and they were kept alive orally and they were passed down by word of mouth from generation to generation. This was the origin of the oral law, as opposed to the written law. Lauterbach in his Rabbinic Essays says this: *Accordingly, the teachers [the Pharisees] themselves came to believe that such generally recognized laws and practices must have been old traditional laws and practices accepted by the fathers and transmitted to following generations [here's the key] in addition to the written law*. In addition to it. Going on: *Such a belief would naturally free the teachers from the necessity of finding scriptural proof for all the new practices*. So they run in parallel. Written law, oral law—both coming from Moses allegedly, both coming from God allegedly. The Jewish Virtual Library says that the pharisees believed that the oral law was equal to the written law—that was their belief. One of the reasons they felt that way was the pharisees believed

that the Roman times were different than the times of Moses. Therefore, a sophisticated, scholarly interpretation of the law was necessary of the Old Testament law, to keep up with the changing times. The Pharisees believed really that God's law—written law—was not universal. It didn't apply for all time and in all cases. It needed to be adapted to the times through scholarly interpretation—a scholarly investigation.

Let me read from The Encyclopedia Britannica under the subject "Pharisee". This is common knowledge, it's just out there—many, many sources. Encyclopedia Britannica "Pharisee": *The basic difference that led to the split between the Pharisees and the Sadducees lay in their respective attitudes toward the Torah. (The first five books. By the way, the Torah means direction or instruction.) So there was a different attitude between the Sadducees and the Pharisees toward the Torah. It goes on: And the problem of finding in it [meaning the Torah] answers to questions and basis for decisions about contemporary legal and religious matters arising under circumstances far different of those of the time of Moses. I'm going on now in this article in Encyclopedia Britannica: In their response to this problem, the Sadducees on the one hand refused to accept any precept as binding unless it was based directly on the Torah. [That is the written law]. The Pharisees on the other hand, believed that the law that God gave Moses was two-fold. Consisting of the written law and the oral law. That is the teachings of the prophets on one hand [the written law] and the oral [I'm quoting now from the Encyclopedia Britannica] and the oral traditions of the Jewish people. These oral traditions had the same weight as God's written law. Going on: Whereas the priestly Sadducees taught that the written Torah was the only source of Revelation, the Pharisees admitted the principle of evolution and the law. [Notice this] Men must use their reason in interpreting the Torah and applying it to contemporary problems. You inject human reason in extrapolating God's law or applying God's law—very interesting.*

Reminds me when God first called me, I asked a Presbyterian minister, do the Ten Commandments always apply in all cases? He said, no they don't. I said, how do you know? He said, you tell me the circumstances and I'll you whether they apply. Well, that's exactly what the Pharisees were setting themselves up to do. The key point is, at the most basic level, the Pharisees put tradition equal to God's written law. God's written word. And they placed human reasoning equal to God's reasoning—basic, basic flaw. That is precisely why God commanded Israel to take a symbolic action.

Let's go to Deuteronomy 31 and we'll begin in verse 25. God told Israel to do something for this very reason—God knew what was going to happen. He knew the

Deuteronomy 31:25 *That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying,
26) Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, [why did God tell them to do that?] that it may be there for a witness against thee. (KJV)*

God was saying, My law was the standard—the only standard. I am putting it with you so you will remember that fact. We know what happened; the Pharisees did the same thing as the Catholics did when the Catholics tried to “Christianize” pagan religion. The 200’s and 300’s A.D. all these pagans were forcibly being converted and they had all of their holidays and yule logs and their mistletoe and their Santa Clauses and all of this, so the Catholic church began to “Christianize” all of this stuff that was not in God’s word. The Jews were faced with the very same thing. In addition to that, the Jews added to the law. We won’t turn there but in Mark 7, Christ chided them for ritual hand washing—remember they were criticizing His disciples because they didn’t wash their hands in a certain manner, according to the tradition of the Elders. Christ said, you have the washing of pots and cups and all such things. Then the Sabbath day’s journey in Acts 1, they added a lot of things. Here’s the point; after the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., the Pharisees put the oral law into writing to preserve it and the result is called the Talmud. We know (if this isn’t evidence enough, I don’t know what is) the fact is, we know the Torah—the first five books of the Bible—there’s five volumes. Guess how many volumes are in the Talmud—Five, Ten, Fifteen? Thirty-four volumes of the Talmud. Do you think they might have added something to God’s law? Five versus 34.

Let me read from a book of the Talmud called the Temurah, it’s section 15B. By their own admission, listen to this: *All the teachers who arose in Israel from the days of Moses, until the death of Joseph Ben Joezer.* Joseph Ben Joezer died in 160 B.C., long before Christ walked the earth. *All the teachers who arose in Israel from the days of Moses until the death of Joseph Ben Joezer, 160 B.C., studied the Torah as Moses did.* [Notice this] *But afterwards, they did not study the Torah as Moses did.* 160 B.C. on. We have to ask the question—why? Study God’s writings, Moses’ writings, the Torah up to 160 B.C. and then what happened? They studied the oral law. They studied their own law, which became the Talmud. They studied what human beings say about God’s law rather than studying God’s word directly. Do we see that happening today? Booklets, magazines about what the Bible says but not studying exactly what the Bible says.

The “Christians” did the same thing after the death of the apostles. They studied the writings of the early church fathers—Saint Augustine and all of those in that time frame. You go to a seminary today and you study what all these humans say about the Bible or about God or about Christ but you don’t really get in and study the Bible itself. Nothing new under the sun. These teachers—the Pharisees—thought they were the ultimate interpreters of God’s law. They knew better than anyone and they held themselves up as extreme examples of righteousness. The Pharisees became the dominant religious influence of the Jewish nation and this was the situation when the Messiah was born. This is what Christ walked into so to speak.

The rest of the time, what we’re going to do is look at three characteristics of the Pharisees in Christ’s day and see if there are parallels and lessons for us today. Just three characteristics. Remember the famous quote by George Santiana, he died in 1952, he was a philosopher and author. He said: *Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.* So shame on us if we don’t learn the lessons from the past

because they can be applied to us today so we can avoid the problems of our forefathers so to speak.

The first lesson that we need to learn.

1. **The Pharisees did not believe or obey the word of God.**

They didn't believe it, they didn't obey it. They believed their oral traditions. They put their oral traditions ahead of God's word, as we've just read. Let's go to John 5 and see that this is made very plain in scripture—John 5:16. We know the Jews set out to persecute Christ and then hatched plots to kill Christ.

John 5:16 *And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, [why?] because he had done these things on the sabbath day. (KJV)*

He healed a man who had been infirm for thirty-eight years. Jumping now to verse 37, Christ is speaking.

37) And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape. (KJV)

The Weymouth translation says, none of you have either heard His voice or seen what He is like. We have covered this verse many, many times before—several of the ministers, I've covered it several times, so we won't take the time to go back over it. There's plenty of material on our website and sermon archives, but basically what Christ is saying, He's talking to those who are trying to kill Him. He says, you don't know who God is—you've never seen God. You wouldn't recognize God if He came up to you and talked to you. You've never heard His voice, meaning of course you've never physically heard His voice but at the same time you haven't heard His voice in scripture. You elevate the scripture but God speaks through scripture and you haven't heard God's voice.

Of course, we know when Christ stepped out of the river after being baptized, a voice came down from heaven and said, this is My Son who I am well pleased and lots of people heard it. There are many other examples so we're not going to go over that now. So Christ is saying, you don't have a clue who I am and you don't have a clue who My Father is and yet you claim to know the scriptures. Verse 38.

38) And ye have not his word abiding in you: for whom he hath sent, [He's referring to Himself] him ye believe not.

39) Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.

40) And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life. (KJV)

Rather, they were trying to kill Him.

- 45) *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust.*
46) *For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me.*
47) *But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words? (KJV)*

The Old Testament contains dozens of prophecies about the Messiah which they refused to believe when He was standing there right in front of them. Let's go to John 7—from chapter 5 to chapter 7—begin in verse 14.

- John 7:14** *Now about the midst of the feast Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.*
15) *And the Jews marvelled, saying, How knoweth this man letters, having never learned? (KJV)*

He doesn't have a PhD beside His name or a doctorate so he can't have a square thought in his head. Verse 19, Christ now speaks.

- 19) *Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law? [Pretty blanket statement—none of you keeps the law] Why go ye about to kill me?*
20) *The people answered and said, Thou hast a devil: who goeth about to kill thee? [They said this while plotting to kill Him of course—liars and hypocrites]*
21) *Jesus answered and said unto them, I have done one work [meaning He healed on the Sabbath day], and ye all marvel.*
22) *Moses therefore gave unto you circumcision; (not because it is of Moses, but of the fathers;) (KJV)*

The covenant of circumcision started with Abraham as Acts 7:8 tell us.

- 22 continued) *... and ye on the sabbath day circumcise a man.*
23) *If a man on the sabbath day receive circumcision, that the law of Moses should not be broken; are ye angry at me, because I have made a man every whit whole on the sabbath day? (KJV)*

The problem was, their oral law said it was a sin to heal on the Sabbath because it was work. That shows you how far off they had gotten over the decades. The Pharisees you see, rejected God's plain word. Let's go to Luke 7 now—back to Luke 7 and begin in verse 28. They had God's word on the scrolls in the synagogues and at the Temple. They had obviously read it in their schooling but they rejected it.

- Luke 7:28** [Christ speaking] *For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.*
29) *And all the people that heard him, and the publicans, justified God, being baptized with the baptism of John. (KJV)*

Here's the key in verse 30.

30) *But the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God against themselves, being not baptized of him. (KJV)*

They rejected the prophecies, they rejected Christ's word, they turned their back, they would have none of it. Let's ask a question under this first point of not believing or obeying God's word—the Pharisees. Do we see that happening today? Are people rejecting God's word and refusing to believe God's word today? Putting tradition before the written word of God. What about the understanding of who the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is—what about that? Let's go to Acts 3 and we'll read the first part of verse 13. Peter is speaking—notice the plain statement.

Acts 3:13 *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; (KJV)*

How more plain can you get? Who is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God of their fathers? It's the God who glorified Jesus, who can only be the Father. No other answer. Let me give you an example—a current example—of an author ignoring this plain scripture. Somebody sent me a recent article and let me quote from it.

Some have been confused by Acts 3:13 which refers to the Father as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This may be easily understood in the light of the fact that the Father and Christ are both God. [Okay] Of course the Father is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the sense that God the Father is supreme and He is your God and my God and everyone's God but this doesn't negate the fact that it was the Word who personally interacted with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and others as God.

Okay, that's somebody's opinion in writing. Does it square with what we just read? It either does or it doesn't. Look at verse 25 of Acts 3.

Acts 3:25 *Ye are the children of the prophets, [Peter is saying] and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, [this is the same God that glorified His Son, Jesus Christ in verse 13] saying [God saying] unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.
26) Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.*

It is so plain, it is so evident that Christ is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is not the God of their fathers, their forefathers—God the Father is indeed the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. So we see, plain and simple that God's word is being rejected. And like the Pharisees, they are doing the same thing today—nothing is new under the sun—but unlike the Pharisees, we need to believe what God's word plainly says. Not what men say about God's word or interpret God's word. God's word is very clear. In Acts 3:13 and verse 25 and verse 26 are very, very clear. There's a lesson for us today of adding and subtracting from God's word or interpreting God's word to reach

a foregone conclusion—we dare not do that. We should look into God’s word for what it plainly says.

The second point:

2. The Pharisees put their own traditions ahead of God’s word.

They added and subtracted to God’s word. Thirty-four volumes versus five. As we have seen, some of the Pharisaical traditions came from Greek culture. Let’s go to Matthew 15:1—I’ll read this out of the New King James.

Matthew 15:1 *Then the scribes and Pharisees who were from Jerusalem came to Jesus, saying, [The Pharisees are among this group]
2) “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? (NKJV)*

Why didn’t they say, why do your disciples transgress the law of God? They said the tradition of the elders.

2 continued) ... *For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread.”
3) He answered and said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?
4) For God commanded, saying, “Honor your father and your mother”; and, ‘He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.’
5) But you say, “Whoever says to his father or mother, ‘Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God’”— (NKJV)*

Meaning they gave that money or that property to the Temple instead of taking care of their parents.

6) *then he need not honor his father or mother.’ Thus you have made the commandment of God [the sixth commandment] of no effect by your tradition.
7) Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:
8) [This is a quote of Isaiah 29:13] These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me.
9) And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ” (NKJV)*

We won’t turn there but in Mark 7:9, it’s Mark’s parallel account—this is what Mark says.

Mark 7:9 *He said to them, “Full well you reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your tradition. (KJV)*

Let me read again from Lauterbach’s book Rabbinic Essays on page 195, he says: *Many new customs and practices for which there was not the slightest indication in the book of the law, were observed by the people and considered by them as part of their religious laws and practices. This is at the time Christ walked the earth. The*

Zondervan Bible Dictionary on page 647 says this: *The doctrines of the Pharisees included predestination; they laid much stress on the immortality of the soul. Being people of the law, they believed in final reward for good works and that the souls of the wicked are detained forever under the earth while those of the virtuous rose again and even migrated into other bodies.*

If you know anything about Greek philosophy, all that I just read is from Greek philosophy and it migrated its way into Jewish philosophy and Jewish teaching through the oral law. Look how far they got off track in just a few hundred years—just amazing. They wanted their own brand of truth and they wanted to be more righteous than God. Adding to God's word.

Do we see this happening today? People adding and subtracting to what God plainly says. One that comes to mind is making an entire doctrine of the term of the Elijah to come. If you were in Worldwide in the '60's, '70's, early '80's, the church taught that Mr. Armstrong was the Elijah to come and was going to restore all things. Then since his death, others are saying today, that they are the Elijah to come and they will carry on and restore all things. But what does the Bible say? Just one verse—Matthew 17:10—I'll read it out of the New King James. Making an entire doctrine out of a term—the Elijah to come.

Matthew 17:10 *And His disciples asked Him, saying, "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" [Quoting Malachi 4:5—that's where it's found] 11) Jesus answered and said to them, "Indeed, Elijah is coming first and will restore all things.*

12) But I say to you that Elijah has come already, and they did not know him but did to him whatever they wished. Likewise the Son of Man is also about to suffer at their hands." (NKJV)

An entire prophetic doctrinal scenario was added to God's word. Let's look at a second example. This involves a sermon that was recently sent to me where a minister said, and I'm quoting: *We know God and Christ are one.* Now, that's what the trinitarians say and he was quoting Deuteronomy 6:4, so let's turn there. You want to place a marker there because we're going to go to another scripture and then come back.

Deuteronomy 6:4 *Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord:* (KJV)

This speaker took this verse and completely changed its meaning. We're going to see in a minute this is a mistranslation. Even as it is quoted here, he took this verse and changed its meaning. What he did was, went to an English dictionary and looked up one—the word one. There's a whole bunch of meanings to the word one and the fifth or sixth definition down was the word, unity. So in English the word one can also mean under circumstances the word unity. So what he did was take the word unity and take it back to Hebrew in Deuteronomy 6:4, saying the Hebrew unity, therefore Deuteronomy 6:4 means God is unity. That is not what the Hebrew says. That's not a definition of the Hebrew. The Hebrew does not mean that. You can't take a definition in a completely

different language and then bring it back into another language, 4000 years earlier and say they are equivalent. You can't do that—it's not even logical. In doing so you can add or subtract from God's word.

For our new brethren, and we have several new brethren here in the last few months, let's look at the truth of Deuteronomy 6:4. We've talked about it before but for our new brethren, we'll go over it very briefly again. Remember it was Christ who quoted Deuteronomy 6:4, He did so in Mark 12:28, so let's turn there but keep your marker in Deuteronomy 6:4. The context is that one of the scribes had heard Christ speaking and he was very impressed.

Mark 12:28 *And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together, and perceiving that he [Christ] had answered them well, asked him [the scribe asked Christ], Which is the first commandment of all? (KJV)*

Very good question—logical question.

29) *And Jesus answered him, [now He is quoting Deuteronomy 6:4] The first of all the commandments is, [Christ is saying this is the first of all the commandments] Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: (KJV)*

Wait a minute—the man asked what is the first commandment. This is odd because in Mark 12:29 and in Deuteronomy 6:4 these are statements, they're not commandments. Hear O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord. That is not a commandment, it's just a statement. Let's go back to Deuteronomy 6:4, the context that we just read in Mark is, what is the greatest commandment of all. In Deuteronomy 6:4 look at the context. You see, Deuteronomy 5 is the Ten Commandments. The first three verses in Deuteronomy 6 are commandments. So do we see a potential problem here? Because the context are commandments and then we come to Deuteronomy 6:4 and it's statement—it's not a commandment. It would cause us to think that maybe something is wrong here—maybe there's a mistranslation or something. These two verses, Mark and Deuteronomy, are used by the trinitarians as primary scriptures for the trinity. The trinitarian doctrine is one ousia in three hypostases. One essence in three substances. Which we all know, as mentioned earlier in the sermonette, it's unexplainable—it just is. So when a minister says God and Christ are one, what he is saying is it's just like the trinity minus one. Two into one—one essence into two substances. Let's look at what the Bible actually says.

In the Hebrew here in Deuteronomy 6:4 there are only six words. You can check any interlinear Bible and see that. Those six words are Shema Israel Yahweh (or Jehovah) Elohim Jehovah (is mentioned again) and then the last word is echad. We have to understand, there is no punctuation in the Hebrew; that was added by translators. In Deuteronomy 6:4 the word "is" is in italics because it is not there in the Hebrew. The word "is" was added by translators. So we're familiar with four of the words. Israel, Jehovah (mentioned twice) and Elohim. We're not familiar with two words—the first one and the last one. The first one is Shema and the last one is echad. Let's look at Shema

very briefly. It's Strong's #8085 and it means, *to hear intelligently; to understand* and it can also mean *obey*. Of the six words in Deuteronomy 6:4, Shema is the only one that's a verb. Therefore, there is no need for the italicized "is". Shema is in the imperative mood; that means it's a commandment or an order—fits in the context. It requires a predicate—something to hear or something to obey. Of course, we know that Jehovah or Yahweh is the one we should hear and the one we should obey. There's no mystery here. Now the first four words of these six are, hear—or you could use the word obey—Oh Israel, the Lord God; obey Oh Israel, the Lord God. Now it's a commandment—now it fits into the context. Both of what Christ said in Mark or here in Deuteronomy. Now let's look at the last word—echad. It's Strong's #259 and yes it can mean one. It can also mean first, alone or only. It definitely does not mean unity. It just doesn't. It can mean one, first, alone or only. You put all six words together...Shema Israel Jehovah Elohim Jehovah echad and it's pretty clear. It means Hear (or obey) oh Israel, the Lord God, the Lord only or the Lord first or the Lord alone. Any of those definitions work. There is no need for punctuation. There's no need for the word is. Now it's a command. This verse is completely understandable as the first commandment. The commands were just given in the previous chapter and the first three verses are commandments. The lawyer asked Christ what is the greatest commandment of all; you see now it's a command—it fits. It's completely understandable; nothing added, nothing subtracted. We just have to remember that the translators of all the Bibles were trinitarian and those things slip in and we have to be aware of it. The context of Deuteronomy 6:4 and the question Christ was asked, this fits it all. It is a command; not a statement.

What does God plainly say to us about this characteristic of the Pharisees of adding and subtracting to God's word or putting tradition ahead of God's word or equal with God's word? Let's go to Deuteronomy 4—we're in Deuteronomy 6, go back two chapters. Deuteronomy 4:2, this is also repeated in Deuteronomy 12:32.

Deuteronomy 4:2 *Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord [Jehovah] your God [Elohim] which I command you. (KJV)*

Don't add anything don't subtract anything. You see the Pharisees forgot a principle in the Psalms of David. We won't turn there but you can write down as a reference, Psalm 19:7. We're told the law of the Lord is perfect. It is universal, it applies in all situations for all time. It is not a relative law based on circumstances that need some scholar to interpret it. God's word is the only standard; therefore, we cannot add or subtract from it. The Pharisees had an ulterior motive. Putting their tradition ahead of God's word. Let's ask ourselves, does the Bible tell us what that motive was?

That leads to the third point; the last point.

3. The Pharisees wanted the people to look to them before they look to God.

Plain and simple. They wanted to be the authority. They wanted the final word. They wanted to be looked to, aggrandized, lifted up and they did so putting themselves ahead of God or between God and a human being. Let's go to Matthew 6:1; Christ condemned them for it.

Matthew 6:1 [Christ says to the Pharisees] *Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, [why?] to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.*

2) *Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. [Which means nothing] Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

(KJV)

Pretty cheap reward.

3) *But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth:*

4) *That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly. (KJV)*

That is why we do not pass a basket during holy days, because it violates what Christ just said. Everybody is looking at the basket to see whose alms go in or who doesn't put anything in and then conclusions are drawn and condemnations are made and all of that. Christ says do it in secret. So we have this box over there and you can surreptitiously slip it into the slot and nobody knows—nobody is the wiser.

5) *And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.*

6) *But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, [your private space] and when thou hast shut thy door, [not even your family is there] pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly. (KJV)*

This tells us that the Pharisees had great vanity and great pride and they wanted to be seen and recognized of men. If we look at the examples in God's word and we look at the examples of the modern-day church, vanity and pride lead to power and control and seeking the esteem of human beings. Not God, not Christ, but human beings. The Zondervan Bible Dictionary says again about the Pharisees, that they "*even wore a distinguishing garb as to be easily recognized*". Only God knows the heart, but God says you shall know them by their fruits. If you wear distinguishing garb, what do you think the motive might be? It might be for people to recognize you and say, oh prophet, oh teacher—and all of that. They pretended to honor God while they were really honoring themselves. Look at Matthew 23:5. The Bible says so plainly. We know Matthew 23 is Christ's rant on the Pharisees and we're just picking up part of it here.

Matthew 23:5 *But all their works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments,*
6) *And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues,*
7) *And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, [not of God, but of men] Rabbi, Rabbi. (KJV)*

That means master: Oh master, master, teach me something—you're so wonderful—God speaks only through you. Now let's go to Luke 16:14; Christ has another condemnation for the Pharisees. The Pharisees hated Christ; they went after Him, they put Him down, they slandered Him, they criticized Him and as we know they ultimately had a part in putting Him to death. Luke 16:14.

Luke 16:14 [Luke says this outright] *And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, [they didn't want to serve others and give of themselves, they wanted to take] heard all these things: and they derided him. [The Messiah]*
15) *And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. (KJV)*

If we haven't learned that, we'll probably never learn it. When men praise you, watch out. If somebody seeks the approval of men, watch out. Here's the problem: Christ interfered with the people looking to the Pharisees. That was a threat to them; the Pharisees wanted the people to look to them as the religious authorities, as the scholars and the interpreters of God's law and Christ interfered with that because Christ kept talking about His Father. I came to do My Father's will. I can't speak anything except what the Father tells me. He was always focusing the people on the Father and the Pharisees wanted the people to look to them. Just like in the Catholic church; they want the people to look to the priests and especially to the Pope. Let's go to John 11:45. Christ interfered with that process that they were cultivating, of having the people look to them, the Pharisees. We're breaking into the context; this is after Lazarus was raised from the dead. After this miracle, and people knew Lazarus—this is nothing that had never been done from their perspective and viewpoint.

John 11:45 *Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him.*
46) *But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.*
47) *Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said ... (KJV)*

They're wringing their hands—what on earth are we going to do? This guy is screwing our thing up for us.

47 continued) ... *What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. (KJV)*

Never thought to ask, maybe God is behind those miracles; maybe we should pay attention to it.

48) If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place [the Greek means our position] and nation.
(KJV)

You see, the Pharisees primary concern was not that possibly God was speaking through Jesus Christ. No, that wasn't their concern at all. They were concerned about holding on to their place—their position. Christ was a threat to them.

We have to ask the question: Do we see this today going on in God's church? Have we not seen down over the decades in God's church, men who wanted to honor themselves instead of honoring God? Men who wanted the brethren to look to them and not God. Of course we have the example of the papacy and the priesthood in the Catholic church, but like the Pope, we've seen many leaders—ministers—of God's church say look to me, I'm an apostle. I'm God's representative on earth, look to me. Look to me, I'm the only one who knows that truth, I'm the only one that has the truth, I'm the only one that understands prophecy. Look to me and I will tell you what to believe. That's the bad one. You look to me and I'll tell you what the Bible says. I'll tell you what God says. I remember when George W. Bush was President, after 9/11 and all, he called himself (you probably remember this) the decider. George Bush says, I'm the decider—in other words the buck stops with me, I make the final decisions is what he meant. These leaders want to be your decider. In other words, to decide for you, to interpret for you, God's law rather than you look into God's law for yourself and see it with your own eyes. That has happened down through the decades. Read the booklet—don't read the Bible—read the booklet. Or listen to this sermon, don't look into the Bible. We've seen that down over the years. Deciding for you, what is right and wrong. What does God say to us about this characteristic of the Pharisees? Looking to them before God. Let's go to Jeremiah 17:5. There are examples throughout the Bible of looking to men rather than looking to God, which we dare not do.

Jeremiah 17:5 *Thus saith the Lord; [Jehovah, Yahweh, God Almighty, Lord of Hosts] Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.*
7) Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is.
(KJV)

We can't forget that—we cannot forget that. Remember what Christ said when He came to the earth? He said, of My own self I can do nothing. I don't seek My own will, I seek the will of the Father that sent Me. John 5:30. Christ says, don't look to Me, look to God. All I am doing is speaking what God tells Me to speak. I am only here because God sent Me to be here. Don't look to men and we certainly can't look to ourselves—we have to look to God.

Let's summarize now. In the end, the Pharisees were labeled hypocrites. Christ called them hypocrites, seven times in Matthew 23. That says something. Over and over and over. They pretended to be oh so righteous but their motives were anything but righteous. We are warned today not to be deceived. Let's go to Matthew 16:6. Christ is warning the people about the Pharisees.

Matthew 16:6 *Then Jesus said unto them, [this is a warning] Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees.*

12) *Then understood they how that he bade them not beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine [the teachings] of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees. (KJV)*

In the Pharisees case, it was teaching the Talmud—the oral law instead of God's written law and the Talmud was of their own making. It was something that was humanly devised with human reasoning. Thirty-four volumes versus five volumes, the doctrine of the Pharisees, Christ was warning—you better pay attention when people start modifying My word, changing My word, adding to My word, subtracting from My word.

Let's go to a New Testament example, Colossians 2:6. Paul is speaking to the church in Colossae but He's really speaking to us to day. God made sure that happens and made sure that we understand, God's word is for all time and for us today.

Colossians 2:6 *As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: (KJV)*

Meaning follow His example. Do what He did. Speak as He spoke, think as He thought.

7) *Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. (KJV)*

Notice this warning, verse 8:

8) *Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy [that happened to the Pharisees] and vain deceit, [meaning they pretended to be righteous but they wanted honor to themselves] after the tradition of men, [putting their tradition in front of God's plain word] after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. (KJV)*

With the Pharisees, they put Greek philosophy in their teachings, they put human reasoning—their reasoning, their scholarly interpretations—into the Talmud and it became the tradition of the fathers, the traditions of men. Today, we see the same thing happening. We say, this is our tradition. We have to ask: Does it come from God or does it come from somewhere else? We can't let tradition supplant God's clear written word. We cannot do that. The Pharisees perverted God's law. They turned people away from the truth by what they taught and by their example. They added and

subtracted things that were never meant to be. They turned people away from God and to themselves. The fact is, down through the centuries in God's church, there's always been a Pharisaical movement in God's church. Adding to God's law, thereby becoming more righteous. Subtracting God's law, thereby to exalt the self or follow a tradition. We just need to remember—this is one of my favorite quotes—it's called Hegel's paradox (I don't know if you've heard that before). Hegel's paradox says: *Man learns from history that man learns nothing from history*. People don't learn. As Solomon said, there is nothing new under the sun. It just keeps happening over and over and over and people keep making the same mistakes over and over and over. If we look into God's word, there is warning after warning; don't follow the mistakes, the sins, the examples, of the Pharisees.

Let's learn the lesson from the Pharisees in Christ's day and beware of the doctrine of modern-day Pharisees.