

Deuteronomy 17:11

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee, thou shalt do: thou shalt not decline from the sentence which they shall shew thee, to the right hand, nor to the left.

Analysis

According to the sentence of the law which they shall teach thee (על-פי התורה, al-pi hatorah)—'according to the mouth of the Torah'—their teaching must align with revealed law, not personal opinion. **According to the judgment which they shall tell thee** (על-משפט, hamishpat)—their application of law to specific cases.

Thou shalt not decline from the sentence...to the right hand, nor to the left—absolute language prohibiting any deviation. This doesn't mean blind obedience—their authority derives from faithfulness to Torah (v. 11a). When authorities contradict God's word, higher allegiance prevails (Acts 5:29). But within proper bounds, their decisions bind the community. This prevents anarchic individualism and maintains covenant order. Joshua 1:7 uses identical language about not deviating from Torah itself.

Historical Context

This became foundational for later Jewish legal tradition emphasizing submission to rabbinic teaching authority. However, prophets repeatedly challenged corrupt priests/judges who violated Torah (Isaiah 1:23, 10:1-2; Jeremiah 5:28; Micah 3:11). Jesus condemned leaders who 'taught as doctrines the commandments of men'

(Matthew 15:9), showing that human authority remains subordinate to divine revelation. The Reformation principle 'sola scriptura' echoes this—ecclesiastical authority must align with Scripture.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How do you test whether spiritual leaders are teaching 'according to the Torah' (God's Word) or merely their own traditions?
2. What's the difference between humble submission to godly authority and blind obedience to corrupt leadership?

Interlinear Text

עַל	גַּם	הַתֹּוֹךְ	אֲשֶׁר	יְוֹרֵךְ	עַל
H5921	According to the sentence	H8451	H834	which they shall teach	H5921
	H6310			H3384	
בְּמִשְׁפָּט	אֲשֶׁר	וְאָמַר	לְ		
thee and according to the judgment	H834	which they shall tell	H0		
H4941		H559			
תַּעֲשֵׂה	לֹא	תִּשְׁאַל	אֲשֶׁר		
thee thou shalt do	H3808	thou shalt not decline	H4480	from the sentence	H834
H6213		H5493		H1697	
וְשַׁמְּאֵל:	לְ	וְמִן	בְּדַבְּרֵךְ		
which they shall shew	H0	thee to the right hand	H4480		
H5046		H3225			
וְנִמְלֵא:	לְ		בְּדַבְּרֵךְ		
			H8040		

Additional Cross-References

Joshua 1:7 (Word): Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.

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