

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 (עַל־פִּי הַתּוֹרָה, 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** (חֲמִשְׁפַּת, 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 H5921	פִּי H6310	הַתּוֹכָה H8451	אֲשֶׁר H834	יֹרֵךְ H3384	וְעַל H5921
According to the sentence		of the law	which they shall teach		
הַמִּשְׁפָּט H4941		אֲשֶׁר H834	יֹאמְרוּ H559	לָךְ H0	
thee and according to the judgment		which they shall tell			
תַּעֲשֶׂה H6213	לֹא H3808	תִּסָּוֶר H5493	מִן H4480	הַדִּבָּר H1697	אֲשֶׁר H834
thee thou shalt do		thou shalt not decline	from the sentence		
יִגְדּוּ H5046	לָךְ H0	יְמִינְךָ H3225	וּשְׂמָאלְךָ H8040		
which they shall shew		thee to the right hand	nor to the left		

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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