

TO JUDGE OR NOT TO JUDGE

"Did you hear about Mr. Jones? I can't believe that he did that. He deserves whatever he's got coming to him."

Have you ever heard someone say something like this? Many times we hear things and react harshly and judgmentally, even though we have no verified facts and are not in a position to make such judgments. This week's Torah portion is **Shoftim** (shoaf-teem)—the Hebrew word for Judges. In this article, we will explore what the Scriptures require for righteous judgment both within a congregation and individually. Are we allowed to judge? If so, how do we do it correctly? This subject could not be more important for every Believer today. There are few things the Bible calls an "abomination," and unrighteous judgment and false scales are among them. If you desire to be the best servant you can be for your King, then the laws of judgment are critical to learn.



JUSTICE

Deuteronomy 16:18-20

"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your towns that the Lord your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with righteous judgment. You shall not pervert justice. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous."

Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 25:15

You shall have a perfect and just weight, a perfect and just measure, that your days may be lengthened in the land which the Lord your God is giving you.

Proverbs 11:1

Dishonest scales are an abomination to the Lord, But a just weight is His delight.

There aren't too many things the Father calls an abomination, my friends, but this is one of them. He simply cannot stand when His people do not judge righteously and tilt the scales to whatever they desire. Dishonesty is a very serious issue with the Almighty and there are very strict punishments for engaging in it. This is one of the top tactics the enemy uses on God's leaders to try to discredit them and pull them off their mission. Just take a look at how many times Moses was accused of this, that, and the other by people who had ulterior motives. Yeshua himself was judged unrighteously and wasn't given a proper trial but a mock one that allowed accusations and allegations to be the "**evidence**" for his public crucifixion. Paul was falsely accused of preaching against the Law and was put in prison for it. The list goes on and on. The enemy uses dishonest scales to destroy people's credibility. God hates it with a passion and calls it an "**abomination.**"

In Hebrew, the word "abomination" is *tow-eh-bah*. It means "to be disgusting, repulsive, loathsome, abominable, and detestable." It's normally connected with idolatry and the wicked, cultic practices of the pagans. So when we engage in "dishonest scales" we are literally acting like pagans and are committing a sin equal to idolatry and evil cultic practices. ***It's that serious.*** As a matter of fact, if we look at the two-letter parent root word from which *towehbah* comes, we find such words as "maggot, grub worm, mistake, weariness, exit, and departure." When we engage in activities that create a false judgment or a double standard and dishonest scales, we are *exiting* and *departing* from the main road we are to travel. We are making a major *mistake* and making our beds in *sheol* with the "maggots and grub worms." Doesn't exactly sound very appetizing, does it?

QUESTION: What are some examples of dishonest scales? Can you think of specific examples of how one could break this commandment?

How about double standards? I would imagine this is the most common. Here's a hypothetical situation to illustrate this concept. Let's pretend that there's a company that discovers that there have been employees who've been accidentally breaking financial protocols. The employees didn't know these protocols even existed. Let's say both the President and Vice President were also unintentionally breaking these policies, but because there are people within the company who have an agenda to take over the company, they decide to only spotlight the President and accuse him of deliberately mishandling company funds. While he's out of town, they remove him from the board and take over the company. Meanwhile, no other employee is judged and the full-time bookkeeper who was hired to make sure the company's finances were in perfect order is not even charged with negligence for not informing the employees of the policies.

This is a perfect example would of "**dishonest scales**" and is an abomination to Yahweh. Why? Because the scales were purposely manipulated to create an outcome that could further an agenda held by the presiding judge. Whenever we judge with a double standard and create false weights and measures, we may get our way in the short run, but there is always a heavy price to pay in the long run.

How many parents do the exact same thing with their children? They judge one child more harshly than the other and do not keep the scales evenly balanced. It's all too easy to *tilt the scales* because it's easier on us or because we actually want a certain outcome. This can destroy a child's self-confidence and can create animosity and division between siblings and parents. Parents, beware that you do not fall into this trap. What measure we use with one, we must use with all.

Matthew 7:1-5

Judge not, that you be not judged. ² For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you. ³ And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴ Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵ Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

We've all heard this set of verses many times over. Don't judge lest you be judged. Unfortunately, that's where most people stop. The verses don't say we're not to judge. They say to make sure that you use just measures when you judge. It's the "Do unto others as you would have done unto you" formula. When we get the sin out of our own lives, we'll be in a much better place to help others with their sins. Notice the purpose of judging is not condemnation, but restoration, to help the other person see what they cannot see so they can be free from the dirt in their eyes. Judging is to be an act of love. This is why the steps of Mathew 18 are so critically important. If you skip those steps and go right to final judgment, you're bypassing the entire judicial system set up by Yahweh for the purpose of making sure that equal weights and measures are used and an abomination is not created in the process.

So here are some practical tips to make sure you don't ever *exit* or *depart* from the narrow road and end up falling into a maggot-filled pit where you offend your Lord at one of the highest levels.

1 . ALWAYS ASSUME YOU ARE MISSING INFORMATION.

This might be the most critical step of all the steps to conflict resolution and proper judging. Going off what you *think* someone did or what someone *said* they did will almost always land you in trouble. Receiving new information that offends you will almost always arouse the flesh and cause a premature judgment. "*I can't believe so and so did that! I'm going to delete them from my Facebook! I trusted them! How dare they?!*" And on and on it goes. New information, even when it seems good, can really burn you if you allow your emotions to be the judge instead of your mind being guided by the scriptures. So always take **EVERYTHING** you hear with a

grain of salt. Reserve judgment until you have the opportunity to hear ALL the facts and pursue the case like an investigator looking for the truth.

Whether it's your spouse, your boss, your children, or someone else, we are commanded to judge righteously. And that starts by forcing yourself to believe that they're innocent until they're proven guilty in a biblical court of law. We all know that we shouldn't trust the news anymore because each reporter and network has a strong bias and they put their spin on what they report in order to lead the viewer to the conclusion they want them to make. Even in our own civil courts, I've learned first-hand that many times there are cases where people are forced to plead guilty to something they didn't do because the laws are written so strictly. By not pleading guilty, they will get twice as much time in prison. From the newspapers to the news networks, from the person at work to your own children, it's almost impossible to get the truth from the first go around of information. That's why we must always assume that we're missing information.

2. GO DIRECTLY TO THE SOURCE

This one is related to the first in the sense that this is what you do in order to get as much of the other side as necessary for you to make a proper judgment. Here's a powerful scripture that helps explain why we need to do this:

Proverbs 18:17

"The first one to plead his cause seems right, until his neighbor comes and examines him."

QUESTION: What do you think this means? Can you think of a time in your life where this has happened to you? Where one person came to you and it seemed like all the information was there until you received the rest of the story?

It happens all the time. If you have children, it happens every single day: *"Mommy, sissy yelled at me and told me to get out of her room! She pushed me and slammed the door on me."* Then you find out that "sissy" was getting dressed and the little one was throwing Legos at her. There are always at least two sides to a situation and it is critical that we get them all before we render judgment. Even if you don't really know all the people involved, even making a judgment in your mind can be an abomination.

3. MAKE SURE THE BIBLICAL PROTOCOLS FOR JUDGING ARE FOLLOWED

In the portion for this week, the judges of Israel were not allowed to put anyone to death without at least two witnesses. If the situation happened in a congregational setting, the entire court process had to be followed with witnesses, full cross-examination, all evidence presented, and a full transcript available for all to see. If any step is skipped, the judgment is rendered invalid because the system wasn't followed. That missed step constitutes a false weight and measure and is, in itself, an abomination. If the situation *didn't* happen in a congregation, and it is of some offense to you personally, you must go to that person, in love, assuming you are missing

information, and give them a chance to present their side. Hold those emotional horses back until you get all the information and can have time to process and pray over it.

4. NEVER RENDER JUDGMENT OUT OF EMOTION

This is a big one. Many people make the mistake of hearing information and immediately rendering judgment. In real life, judges never make this mistake. This is why, in our court system, sentencing always happens on a different day than a trial. That time is designed to help calm the emotions and give the judge the ability to weigh all the evidence and to make the right call. Humans are all too similar to the Queen of Hearts from *Alice in Wonderland*. We hear something we don't like and we instantly say, "*Off with their head!*"

5. NEVER JUDGE WHEN YOU ARE NOT A JUDGE

Far too many of us judge situations when we do not have the authority. Why should we judge someone, either in action or in our minds, when we don't have all the information, haven't heard both sides, are not privileged to know all the details of the situation, and can't really do anything about it, anyway?

Let's take the President of the United States. The news reports that the President authorized some sort of military act in a foreign country and the media freaks out about it, calling it appalling. The President stands by his decision and does not answer any of the media's questions so the people are left to judge without all the information. Most will make their judgment based only on the information the news gives us. We don't even consider that it's possible that the military action was deliberately created as a distraction to keep eyes away from a *real* underground mission of some significance to national security. What appears to be wrong from our perspective is only wrong because we don't have all the information. This is why the final step is so important in making sure that we are judging righteously.

6. PRAY FOR THE SITUATION AND PERSON UNDER FIRE

The Father is constantly testing His people's hearts to see if they're going to obey Him. Let's take a look back to Deuteronomy 8 to see one of these covert tests.

Deuteronomy 8:1-5

Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. ² And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. ³ So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. ⁴ Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. ⁵ You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you.



This is a great example where Yahweh secretly allows a major trial to come before His people for one purpose: *To see what is in their hearts*. Would they follow His prescribed paths of instruction or would they do what they wanted to do? Most of us don't realize that when we're offended or we hear information that causes our flesh to want to judge that we're being secretly tested to see what's in our own hearts, our own *eyes*, so to speak. He wants to know what you're going to do with it. Are you going to follow the scriptures and assume innocence until guilt is proven? If the situation affects you are you going to pursue all the information to the point where you have to make a decision? Are you going to presume and render judgment or condemnation? Or are you going to pray for the person and judge righteously, if you choose to judge at all? After all, how do we know that the Father did not allow the person to make such a mistake on purpose to train them for the future? Shall we judge someone's schooling? Do we judge our children when they make mistakes in school and bring home a bad grade? Or do we try to assist them with their mistake so that they'll be successful in the future? If we understand that very basic concept and do it for our children, how much more does the Creator of mankind, the Eternal Teacher of His children, chastise those He loves and allow us to make mistakes so that we can grow from them, making us more like Him? If He looks at our futures with hope and runs

alongside us as we try to ride our spiritual bikes, how much more should we look at others in the same way? And this is why the last step is to pray for those who fall into this category in your life.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's far too easy to judge prematurely. But it's not so easy to follow the scriptures and then pray for the situation or the person. No one likes to be judged, much less judged falsely. Although there is a lot more that we could discuss from this week's parsha, it's named Shoftim for a reason. We are all judges and we need to judge according to the law of love. Be careful. Everything is a test. The Father is always looking for people He can trust and for those who will follow His word no matter what!

What's in your heart's wallet? ;)

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