

GOSPEL GAZZETTE

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Gods Laws

What's the difference between law, commandments, precepts, ordinances, statutes and judgements?

Many people have read these words in the Bible, but how many actually stop to ponder their meaning? There are many places in the Bible where these different words are used. This article is not intended to list all them, but to define the differences and similarities of each of these words. It is my goal that when you have finished reading this article, you will have gained a greater understanding of these terms.

God's scriptures are given to us for many reasons. The book of Timothy gives us those reasons.

¹⁶ All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: ¹⁷ That

the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)
(KJV)

Inside these scriptures are God's words giving us guidance and correction. These words are given in his laws, judgments, precepts, statutes and commandments. Each of these words has a different meaning, and should be given their rightful attention. Let's look at the differences and similarities of these words.

What is a "law?"

Strong's says:

08451 towrah {to-raw'}
or torah {to-raw'}
from 03384; TWOT -
910d; n f
AV - law 219; 219
1) law, direction,
instruction
1a) instruction,
direction (human or
divine)

Webster's defines a law as "a rule of conduct or action."

We can understand from these descriptions that the word "law" was given to us for instruction or direction in our conduct and actions. The term "law" is a general term that encompasses many specific things. We will see when we study the other words that the word law encompasses all the other words inside it. The other words define the specifics of the general term "law."

The word "commandment" is much more specific. A commandment is a specific order. An order is given from someone in the highest authority. Our God holds the highest position of authority to us, and is therefore qualified to give us commandments. The most commonly known commandments are the Ten Commandments. These Ten Commandments are our "laws of conduct and actions." They define our specific conduct toward our God and toward our fellow man.

A “precept” is a principle intended as a general rule of conduct or action. This deals with the intent and thought behind a rule. These principles or precepts can be applied to many areas where the direct law or rule isn’t stated.

An “ordinance” is a civil enactment or law pertaining to limits or conditions. When God instilled the Passover, with it he included the ordinances (or specific conditions and rules pertaining to it).

A “statute” is a law that is established by a legislative body. A statute also pertains to a law that deals with more than one person to fulfill the law. An example of a statute would be the statute of the services of the tabernacle that the Levites performed. It took a “body” of individuals to fulfill this law.

A “judgment” is a sentence or formal decree. It includes the act, the place, the suit, the crime, and the penalty.

This is what Strong’s has to say about judgment:

2920 krisis {kree'-sis} perhaps a primitive word; TDNT - 3:941,469; n f AV - judgment 41, damnation 3, accusation 2, condemnation 2; 48

- 1) a separating, sundering, separation
 - 1a) a trial, contest
- 2) selection
- 3) judgment
 - 3a) opinion or decision given concerning anything
 - 3a1) esp. concerning justice and injustice, right or wrong
 - 3b) sentence of condemnation, damnatory judgment, condemnation and punishment
- 4) the college of judges (a tribunal of seven men in the several cities of Palestine; as distinguished from the Sanhedrin, which had its seat at Jerusalem)
- 5) right, justice

We see from our study that God has given us many different kinds of laws. God has addressed the specific rules of conduct toward himself and toward the

people around us in his commandments. He recognizes and identifies the principle of a law, to help us understand the “intent” of the law. This intent then can be used in many applications. He defines conditions and regulations and limitations in his ordinances, just as our individual cities have local ordinances pertaining to specific limitations within our town. Lastly, he defines righteous judgment, giving us a guideline for implementing punishments and sentencing of abusers of the various laws.

Let’s recap:

Law =

A rule of conduct or action
(Also encompasses all the rest of the definitions)

Commandment =

A specific order

Precept =

Intent behind a rule

Ordinance =

Specific conditions or rules to a law

Statute =

Established by a
legislative body/more
than one person to fulfill

Judgment =

A sentence or formal
decree or punishment

I hope that through this
study you have a better
understanding of the
differences in the words
God uses for his laws.