

## WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE COMMANDMENTS, STATUTES AND JUDGMENTS?

In God's instruction manual to mankind, the Bible, God has given us some wonderful laws that tell us what makes like work and what doesn't. They are truly amazing laws that are full of incredible wisdom and if practiced in our society today would bring great peace, happiness and prosperity. Now these laws are often described in the Bible by three divisions.

Let's have a look at a typical verse that describes these three divisions. Please turn with me to Deuteronomy 7, verse 11. We read, "Thou shalt therefore keep the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which I command thee this day, to do them." This three-fold division of the laws of God is mentioned about 14 times in the Bible.

Now what's the difference between the commandments, the statutes and the judgments? First of all, what are the commandments? Well, that's an easy for most of us. When Christ told the rich young man to keep the commandments and the young man asked Him which ones, Christ quoted some of the Ten Commandments that God gave in Exodus 20.

The Ten Commandments give the broad principles of how to obey God and show love to Him and to our neighbours. The statutes are secondary laws that go further and expand upon the commandments. Life is complex and so God in His love gave Israel further detail and specifics as to how to show love for Him and others through the statutes.

Having said that, what's the difference between statutes and judgments? Now, statutes are secondary laws that made by lawmakers. Judgments, on the other hand, refer to judicial decisions made by a judge, like God for example, based upon the principles behind those laws to come up with a decision as to how best to apply those laws.

So how do we go about determining whether a law in the Old Testament is a statute or a judgment? Well, first of all, we need to understand why the particular law was made.

For our first example please turn to Deuteronomy 22:8 and we read, "When thou buildest a new house, then thou shalt make a battlement for thy roof, that thou bring not blood upon thine house, if any man fall from thence." Why was this law given? Well, in ancient times people had flat roofs and people used to spend a fair bit of time on the top of their roofs for various reasons and so there was the danger of people falling off a roof. This was a basic safety law like so many of the safety laws that governments pass today.

The next question we have to ask is whether that law can be applied for all cultures at all time. Well, today few people have flat roofs and putting a balustrade on some of our steep roofs might pose more of a problem than not having one. The principle here is to preserve the health and safety of those who might venture onto the roof. As the principle cannot be applied to all roofs this is a judgment made by God based upon the principle of protecting the health and safety of those who might venture onto a roof.

Let's look at the laws that cover the sacrifices and offerings. Please turn with me to Jeremiah 7:22. God, in this verse, says "For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt

offerings or sacrifices.” We see that God didn’t originally give Israel these laws when they came out of Egypt. They’re not found in the book of Exodus but in the latter books written after the time when they sinned by worshipping the golden calf.

The sacrifices and offerings were but types of the greater sacrifice of Christ to come. They taught Israel of the need for Christ’s sacrifice to come later on and, are no longer required because of Christ’s sacrifice. They were judgments made by God, because of their sins at Mt Sinai, to help impress on a carnal, rebellious people the need for a greater sacrifice to come.

We’ve looked at judgments. Let’s look at a couple of statutes. A good example of a statute are the holy days. While many think that Christ’s sacrifice does away with the need to keep these “Jewish” holy days they are ignorant of the fact that the holy days teach us a lot about the great plan of God to harvest all souls and save all mankind.

By keeping the holy days we learn so much about God’s plan. This principle behind these holy day laws can be applied for all people, for all time and are thus statutes. We read of Egypt having to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in the World Tomorrow in Zechariah 14. Now please turn to Leviticus 23:31. This verse makes it clear that the holy days are statutes. About the Day of Atonement it says, “Ye shall do no manner of work: *it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.*”

The dietary laws can also be applied for all people, for all time. Most of the animals that are unclean in Leviticus 11 were designed by God to be scavengers and are not fit for human consumption. Christ’s sacrifice does nothing to change that basic fact of God’s creation. Thus, the dietary laws are statutes, as opposed to judgments.

The judges of Israel also made judgments on issues not specifically mentioned by God in the law. This is spoken of in Deuteronomy 17. Please turn to Deuteronomy 17 and we’ll read verses 8 to 10. “If there arise a matter too hard for thee in judgment (dropping to verse 9)...thou shalt come unto the priests the Levites, and unto the judge that shall be in those days, and enquire; and they shall shew thee the sentence of judgment. And thou shalt do according to the sentence, which they of that place which the LORD shall choose shall shew thee; and thou shalt observe to do according to all that they inform thee.”

They didn’t have to go to the judges if they felt that they could work out their problem. But if they felt the problem was too hard to work out they had the option to bring it to the judges and they would make a judgment based upon determining why the laws were made and applying those principles to the matter brought before them.

This law is the basis of the church’s binding and loosing power that Christ gave to it in Matthew 18. As long as the judgments don’t directly violate the laws and the word of God, the church has the power of judgment in ecclesiastical matters. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6 Paul chastised the Corinthians for going to unconverted judges of the world instead of the church to decide upon matters between brethren.

Members don’t have to go to the ministry to sort out their problems with their brethren but if it is too hard to sort out Paul admonishes us to take it to the church and abide by the decision rather than go to court against our brother. The obvious exceptions to this, are,

over criminal matters and for civil matters that the church has no authority over, for example, finalising a divorce.

One good example of a church judgment was when Mr Armstrong made a judgment that smoking is a sin based upon 1 Corinthians 6:20 which says we are to glorify God in our body. He understood that every cigarette does us harm and that the body was not designed for taking in the dangerous chemicals that are inhaled by smoking.

Another is where he made the decision that third tithe was no longer compulsory in many countries as members are already paying the equivalent of third tithe in their taxes to the government, which now takes care of the needs that were to be met by the third tithe in ancient Israel.

Now the church is not perfect and so we have seen the church hold different positions on the very same issue at different times. A couple of examples of this are church judgments on makeup and interracial marriage. Prohibitions that were made on these two issues were not based upon a specific statute in the Bible that forbid them but were judgments based upon principles which the church interpreted and then made a decision upon.

I have just about completed writing a book on all the laws and statutes and I can say that it makes a fascinating study. A number of the books which I sourced information from about these laws are available in our book library here. I would encourage you all to make the most out of the resources that are available to you in the library.

For our final scripture please turn to Ezekiel 36:27. After God brings our Israelite nations back out of captivity after the great tribulation He says this to them, "And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them."

We will be the ones who will teach them God's commandments, statutes and judgments in the World Tomorrow. In conclusion, if we are to be the ones who will teach them these laws in the World Tomorrow then it behooves all of us to be good students and learn all we can about them now.