

## Unlawful Vs. Illegal

At times, I listen to the Grammar Girl podcast. It helps me keep brushed up on my English usage and grammar. I was sure it would help me write articles better, but I had no idea I would hear something to help me understand Scripture better. Someone asked about “illegal” and “unlawful.” Read what was said about the difference.

*Black's Law Dictionary* defines unlawful as *not authorized by law, illegal*. Illegal is defined as *forbidden by law, unlawful*. Semantically, there is a slight difference. It seems that something illegal is expressly proscribed by statute, and something unlawful is just not expressly authorized.

Jaywalking is a good example of an unlawful act. Traffic regulations do not typically say that you cannot walk diagonally through an intersection. So, it is not illegal. Rather, traffic regulations typically provide that you can cross within a crosswalk when the little walky-man appears. Crossing in any other way is unlawful because it is not expressly permitted.

Selling cocaine is a good example of an illegal act. A federal law specifically provides that you may not do so.

Many today act as if I'm crazy when I suggest we are looking for permission to act and not just prohibition to keep us from acting. However, this is not just something somebody in a “church of Christ” made up and passed on to everyone else; this is a principle people understand even in American law.

In the New Testament, there are “illegal acts.” That is, acts specifically prohibited; e.g. **Romans 13:14** says, “...make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.” Like the issue of cocaine in our modern law, God specifically forbid this.

However, there are also “unlawful acts.” That is, acts which are not authorized by the New Testament; e.g. **Ephesians 5:19** and **Colossians 3:16** both teach us to sing and make the melody in our hearts. Yet, there is no authorization for adding a mechanical instrument. Therefore, the instruments would be unlawful. Like the issue of jaywalking, we cannot find a “thou shalt not;” however, God's law has told us what kind of music to use as we worship God and teach others. It does not provide for the instrument.

I found one more statement in the podcast extremely interesting:

Practically, there is no difference for punishment purposes. Both illegal and unlawful acts can get you into trouble.

**II Timothy 3:16-17** explains the Scriptures, in their entirety, provide us with everything we need to serve, honor, and glorify God. If we simply stay within their pages, we'll be complete, competent and ready for every good work. I'm not making this stuff up. We're not making this stuff up. These are simply principles everyone should understand applied to using the Bible. Let's make sure we don't commit anything illegal or unlawful.