TWO “UNTILS”

In Matthew 5:18 the word until is used twice. Jesus says, "Until heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished".

This would be a difficult statement to understand, if it were not for the fact that Jesus made the same statement on another occasion, using a different form of words.

"But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one stroke of a letter of the Law to fail" (Lke 16:17). You can see that Jesus didn’t mean that the Law would remain in force until heaven and earth pass away.

The second "until" tells us when the Law would pass. It would pass when all was accomplished that would fulfill it.

What Jesus means is this: "For the time being, until I have done all that is required to fulfill the Law, it will remain in force in its entirety, and is as much a fixture as the very heavens and earth."

ONE “UNLESS”

In Matthew 5:20 the word unless is used to underline another important fact. "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Mtt 5:20).

The righteousness of one who practices the law (even when sincere and devout) is not sufficient to save him and merit him entry into God’s kingdom.

Paul (who was a Pharisee) said, "not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith" (Php 3:9).

This is the only way to "be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect" (Mtt 5:48).

We do need to obey God to the very best of our ability, but as an expression of our faith, showing it to be genuine, rather than as an attempt at merit.

DEEP THOUGHT

These questions are for you to think about and discuss. Other parts of this lesson may help you with the answers.

1. Does the phrase in Matt 5:18, "until heaven and earth pass away" set the time at which the law would be abolished? Look for another "until" in the same verse.

2. In Matt 5:17-20, does Jesus mean that people were to keep the whole law of Moses until Jesus had fulfilled it, and they entered the kingdom of God?

3. If people practised what Jesus taught in Matthew 5:21-48, while trying to keep the law of Moses as well, would there be a conflict between the two? Would they break the law?

4. In Matthew 5:16 Jesus says that our good works should be seen of men, yet in 6:1 he says not to practice our righteousness before men to be seen by them. Can you explain this so as to show that there is no contradiction?

5. What good is the Sermon on the Mount for Christians?

ANGER

The statement Jesus makes about anger is linked to the kind of feelings that could lead to murder (Mtt 5:21-22). Jesus does not refer to the kind of feelings that are like the wrath of God. This is righteous anger. The Bible says, "Be angry, and do not sin" (Eph 4:26 Psa 4:4).

When we see injustice and evil, we are right to be angry, just as God is. The difference is why we are angry — what motivates our anger, and whether we are malicious in expressing it.