

UPDATING EDWARD'S TEACHING ON HEAVENLY REWARDS

by Matt Perman

Recently I've been thinking a bit more about [Jonathan] Edwards teaching on heavenly rewards.

Briefly, Edwards teaches, as the Bible seems to (Luke 19:13–19; 2 Corinthians 4:17–18; Ephesians 6:8), that there are degrees of rewards in the new heavens and new earth. But this will not be the cause of any unhappiness, for it doesn't mean that those with less reward will be only two-thirds happy, while those with more reward will be fully happy.

Instead, everyone's cup will be full; it's just that not everyone will have the same size of cup. In this way, there can be greater degrees of happiness, while at the same time everyone is fully happy. There can be greater and lesser joy without implying that there is any sadness or dissatisfaction that goes along with the lesser degrees of joy.

Here's how Edwards put it, using the analogy of a ship:

It will be no damp to the happiness of those who have lower degrees of happiness and glory, that there are others advanced in glory above them: for all shall be perfectly happy, every one shall be perfectly satisfied. *Every vessel that is cast into this ocean of happiness is full, though there are*

some vessels far larger than others; and there shall be no such thing as envy in heaven, but perfect love shall reign throughout the whole society.

In fact, Edwards argues that degrees of happiness will actually increase everyone's happiness, because everyone's happiness is interconnected. In other words, when one person sees another person with a greater degree of happiness, because of their perfect love for others, the person with the lower degree of happiness will rejoice at the fact that his brother or sister in Christ has a higher degree of happiness. This principle from 1 Corinthians 12:[26]: "When one member is honored, they all rejoice."

Here's how Edwards puts it:

Those who are not so high in glory as others, will not envy those that are higher, but they will have so great, and strong, and pure love to them, that they will rejoice in their superior happiness; *their love to them will be such that they will rejoice that they are happier than themselves; so that instead of having a damp to their own happiness, it will add to it . . .*

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I love Edwards' teaching here and find it beautiful.

Now, there is also one thing I would add to it: Not only will everyone's cup be "full" with greater and lesser degrees of happiness, but everyone will also be as happy as they want to be. In other words, someone with a smaller "cup" will feel that the size of their cup is just the right size for them. They won't "want" a larger cup at that moment, but will see that they are actually happier (more satisfied) with less of a cup at that point than a larger cup.

I think Edwards would agree, because this actually seems to be an implication of what Edwards is saying. For if everyone's cup is full, that implies zero discontent. Which, conversely, implies a *preference* for whatever level of happiness it is that you have.

Along with this—and Edwards also points this out—our happiness in the next world will not be static, but ever increasing. So if you start out with half the capacity for happiness as Martin Luther or Edwards himself, you aren't going to stay that way but will continually grow in your capacity for happiness—forever.

One last thing here, which is an interesting connection with productivity. As I've talked about before, when we talk about being productive, what we are really talking about is the doing of good works—the works which God created us in Christ to do, and which he prepared beforehand for us (Ephesians 2:10).

Understanding helpful productivity practices and tools, in other words, enables us to amplify our effectiveness in good works. And thus, perhaps, it helps us to in some sense lay up greater heavenly reward. (Which, of course, Edwards would also approve of, as his twenty-second resolution was "to endeavor to obtain for myself as much happiness, in the other world, as I possibly can, with all the power, might, vigor, and vehemence, yea violence, I am capable of, or can bring myself to exert, in any way that can be thought of." Wisely utilizing effective productivity practices would certainly fall within Edward's aim here of using whatever

might and vigor he can to lay up greater joy in heaven.)

Now, we need to be careful here, because I don't want to imply that those with greater access to technology, for example, will have greater reward in heaven simply because they were born in a country where they could access these things. The Bible also talks about how "to whom much is given, much shall be required," and that might be part of the solution—since we have been given much, if we don't use these practices and opportunities to do more good, we are failing to be faithful with what God has given us; likewise, those without access to them (right now) are held to a different standard.

But I don't think we should primarily cast this in the light of "you better do this, or else," because I don't think the Bible does (and, that's not very motivating). Instead, the primary emphasis I think the Scriptures reveal to us is: "What a great opportunity we have here. God has blessed us with great knowledge and many technological tools that can increase our productivity, and as a result we can have the joy and privilege of doing more good for others and his glory than we otherwise might have been able to."

The ability of productivity practices and tools to amplify our efforts in doing good is a wonderful and amazing thing, and is to be utilized to the full. And, perhaps, there is a connection here with laying up greater rewards in heaven.