Experiencing Ambivalence

Ambivalence is defined as "the state of having mixed feelings about something." It's when we *simultaneously* have *contradictory* strong feelings about a situation or event. Many people confuse ambivalence with indifference. They're not the same. To be indifferent is to show little or no concern about something. To be ambivalent is to care deeply – to have strong feelings about two conflicting things.

Ambivalence is what parents feel when their child is dropped off for his first day of school. They feel both happiness as their son embarks on a journey of learning and education but feel sadness that those precious "toddler" days have ended.

It's what parents feel when their child is joined to another in matrimony. They feel joy at the blessed union as their daughter enters a new chapter of life but feel sadness as she transfers her greatest earthly affection to another.

It's what many of us feel when at a funeral of a faithful Christian. We feel joy that the child of God has been freed from a life of pain and trials and graciously welcomed into an eternal reward, but we feel anguish to be left behind to carry on without his wisdom and insight.

Indeed, all who have lost faithful loved ones – faithful husbands, faithful wives, faithful parents – simultaneously feel both sadness and joy. They feel heartache at the loss of the loved one but bliss that their loved one now lives with God in eternity.

Paul expressed ambivalence in Philippians 1: 21-24 when he wrote: *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.*

Even Jesus felt the tug of two opposing feelings as he prayed in the Garden. Note his mixed feelings – the conflict between desire and duty – expressed in Matt. 26:36-39: *Then Jesus went...to a place called Gethsemane, and said to the disciples, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.”He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and became anguished and distressed. Then he said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved, even to the point of death. Remain here and stay awake with me.” Going a little farther, he threw himself down with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if possible, let this cuppass from me! Yet not what I will, but what you will."* Ambivalence often manifests itself in the mixed emotions we feel when our duty and our desire are at odds with one another.

Whenever I partake of the Lord's Supper, I feel ambivalence – two strong, mixed feelings: great sadness and great joy. I feel sadness because of the evil men who nailed the Son of God to the cross and because my sins contributed to that necessity. I also rejoice, for it was Jesus' amazing, sacrificial act of love – his horrible death on the cross – that made salvation not only available to me but to those vile men who nailed him there as well.

Think about it: whenever we eat the Lord's Supper, we participate in a *sorrowful* *celebration* – a time of both *heartache* and *happiness*. As we partake we are simultaneously reminded of the *horror* and the *hope* of the cross.

- Matt Hennecke, April 2025