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Grace in Winter

Before we begin this week's article I would like you to spend a little time with your thoughts. When we mention winter, what comes into your mind? Do it mentally or write it down, nothing all that elaborate just word associations.

Finished? Now do the same for summer. OK!

If you are a somewhat normal human being, your winter thoughts included, cold, dark, miserable, wet, snow, and so forth.

For summer your concepts were probably, warm, sunny, colorful, flowers, birds, and eventually you got around to too hot.

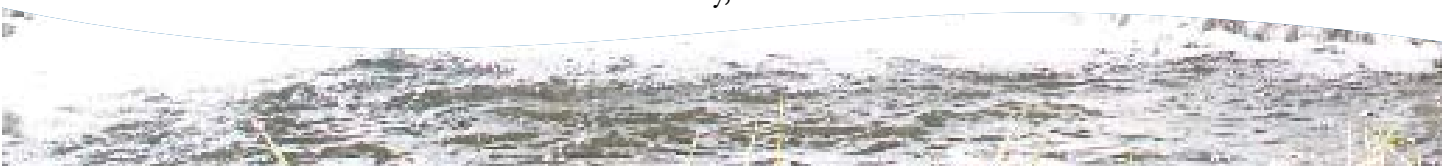
What you have just accomplished is a very real application of the absolutes of natural law and common grace, in which winter was law and summer was grace, at least until you got to those unbearably hot days when you sought out air conditioning where ever it may be.

Now let us say, when the

alarm clock went off this morning you got up and looked out the window and there was six inches of new fresh snow on the ground and it was snowing heavily. Your first thoughts were, "Oh, God how am I going to get to work?" As you stood there gazing at the increasing snow, you apprehended the reality that you can't get to work, at least not on time, and no one is really going to know when that time really is, because your boss lives on the other side of town and the weather is always worse in that more ritzy suburb.

So you go into the kitchen and the coffee is warm and fresh, you look for the morning paper, and it has yet to arrive, so you turn on the TV and get the news. The news is that this sudden storm is expected to add another six to eight inches before it quits later this morning. With all that snow you are snowbound at least for the day. "Praise the Lord!" You have a day when the cares of the world and work are only what you decide to make them.

What you are experiencing is the title of this week's article, "Grace in Winter."



Of course there are a few who might think, Bah! Humbug! But that probably is your boss across town, and you think it serves him right he won't have you to boss around, at least for today.

In the proper context snow is a wonderful thing. For one it covers up all the dark and dreary. Provided you still have electricity it is sort of cool. This afternoon after the snow stops you can walk to the park, and watch the kids sledding down the hill, school is dismissed for them also. Isn't winter a blast all of a sudden, at least for a day or two? Soon however you have to make adjustments to that common law absolute of winter, all winters.

Last Wednesday we did a little preaching, well maybe a lot of preaching, about common graciousness, how we needed more of it in our modern world, and how the church seems to be more caught up with achieving material blessings along with the world, rather than being a source of contrasting graciousness.

Friday in his cartoon Brute' basically said that for a change we had a week in which nothing stupendous happened. In this gracious grace theme, we could look out the window at the snow and just sort of wonder when it might end and more stupendous change occur, like the fires this week now surrounding Los Angeles.

On Saturday, the G20 economic leaders met in Washington to determine the fate of the economic world. We posted some thoughts that we expected that nothing much would happen, and it didn't as we reported on Monday. The headline for that Monday report was **"G20 Summit: Drifting snow; Forecast: A long cold economic winter."**

Sunday sandwiched in between the G20 posts were the morning and evening thoughts of Charles Spurgeon, **"The Lord is my portion, saith my soul."** from Lamentations 3:24, and **"Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty."** from Isaiah 33:17.

Both of Spurgeon's comments are about God's specific grace, essentially in the winters of life. It is the specific grace of God that covers all the dark, dreary, cold, and makes it clean, white, and peaceful. The cold is still there and needs to be respected, but in the falling snow you see the transcendence of God, and the only color shown is the green of the evergreen.

The long cold economic winter now facing the whole world was and is caused by a few

greedy men doing their own thing relative only to themselves. "Because they could." The G20 communique basically said that for the time being they are going to do nothing about the few greedy men, making huge amounts of money creating and marketing complex financial instruments commonly known as derivatives. Why is that?

Simply because it is these, what I call funny money schemes, that have provided for economic expansion with little inflation, because the creation of the funny money, transported the need for true fiscal responsibility, into an undefined distant future. The problem is that that distant future has a tendency to become the present. Isn't time a wonderful creation, we attempt to make it always summer and never winter, but really all we really end up creating is a world where **"it is always winter but never Christmas."**

The quotation of course comes from C. S. Lewis', "The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe," in the "Chronicles of Narnia." I would suggest you see the movie, if you do not have the time to read the book, but I can only recommend the BBC version of the video. The latest big screen version lost the complex allegory in the special effects for the sake of special effects. The BBC version is done much more on a human scale, with real costumed people playing talking animals, and comes closer to touching "deep magic before time began," than flashy computer graphics rendered in real time.

You now hear calls to regulate and prosecute those evildoers, which brought about this severe economic winter. But the truth behind all that is, there but by the grace of God go I. The reason most of us didn't and wouldn't do similar acts, is that we can't, for we are not in the position to let our arrogance affect many others, we are pretty much determined to be selfish masters of our own fate, for the good of all society.

That doesn't mean we should not get rid of derivatives and other financial horseplay, and again put the whole world on a sound financial footing. If not prosecute the perpetrators, at least we need to move them into positions of normal folks. However, this is not just a new game in town, it has been going on, for most of our adult lives, if not our whole lives. One difference now is the economy of scale. Furthermore many problems are new, because even in the Great Depression, it was a much simpler game to understand and therefore to fix, that fix took a decade. The world's current financial leadership looks like they don't know what they are doing, because they don't know what they are doing, there

is no historical precedence for what is now happening all over the world.

But before we get too legalistic, for a long time we allowed them, the bad guys, to do their thing, because we also benefited. On a much smaller scale, we all got money and some wealth, by doing things where we really didn't deserve the reward. Just because the whole scheme is a house of cards, it was a really big deck and we were but a single card. The true human perspective is that we all believe cheap prosperity beats hard work and true risk every hand.

Seasons are part of God's natural law. If you don't want to consider that they came from God, that is your choice. However you look at it, all types of seasons control human life, hence seasons never are really relative. With enough money you can move to a climate where it is never winter, or you may live there now, but at the same time, where it is always warm and sunny, Christmas just isn't quite the same, and snow is undefined also. So in southern California they have their fire season, in Seattle they have their drip season. They are all different, but the absolute reality is that human beings don't control the seasons, never have, never will.

What has happened economically in our lifetimes is that well meaning men and women in positions of leadership have tried to create a world where ***"it is always Christmas but never winter."*** For decades they have pushed back reality and now an economic winter has overridden that wishful, and shall we say childish optimism. So how are you going to handle this winter?

I would suggest you do things differently than you do in any other season. You do things that apply to real winters. You must accept this reality as what it really is, and make plans to tough it out, if that is the right adjective. Instead of buying a new snowmobile, you try and find a used pair of cross country skis, and plan on reading some of those good books you have put off all these years. How about spending time with family and friends, or something really novel, make some new friends especially friends that tend to broaden your perspective.

Light is different in winter than in any other season. Light becomes more precious, because it illuminates darkness. You are now all thinking about Christmas lights, but before there were Christmas lights there was a Hanukkah light.

Those are generally considered lights of peace; both Christmas light and the Hanukkah light represent a specific miracle, a similar light that cannot be quenched.

What brought about this harsh economic winter were not simply bad people trying to do bad things. Or good people trying to make the good times last forever, it was like all people we want to do it our own way in our own timing. That arrogance will one day absolutely succumb to the natural seasons, even if only in allegory.

Many will say that it is God's judgment on the wicked, adding the spoken or unspoken corollary if you do right like me you shall not be judged. That is not grace in winter that is law for law, in which no grace can be found. That is the truth why most people would prefer to be "spiritual but not religious."

"Well if they just understood the Bible specific law like I do, they would understand, repent, and ask Jesus into their heart, and begin to live the Christian life."

The problem with the spiritual person is that they really can't see all that much difference between the Christian life above and their own, simply because there is not really all that much difference. While there is a reference to Jesus present, what you are really exchanging is common or natural law for a specific revelation of Jewish Law, poorly adopted into contemporary society. There is no grace in this winter present and definitely no amazing grace, saving a wretch, but only a hypocrite.

The Jewish Apostle Paul to the gentiles said that he only preached Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected from the dead, for in Christ's death and resurrection resides truth that baffles mankind's most brilliant knowledge and wisdom. That is amazing grace in any season, but winter of all sorts of metaphors, sometimes helps us put our lives in proper perspective.

A difference in the quantity and quality of light can be seen much more distinctly in winter than the other seasons. If it were not for the miracle of light itself, life could not exist. In this economic winter, we are now beginning to be forced to undergo, that difference in light's attributes will become more apparent. Those lights are a light from God and a light of worldly understanding. By your choice of which light, will determine whether you find grace in this economic winter or only disappointment and hardship.

There is a Messianic passage by a popular Jewish prophet. It speaks to a coming Messiah for Jews. By the grace of God alone, gentiles were and are brought into that covenant. That is truly the definition of grace in winter, however this passage is really not that well liked in any circles. To put it bluntly, especially in America in and out of the church, it is a conversation stopper. It is found in **Isaiah 50:9-11:**

*Surely the Lord GOD will help Me;
Who is he who will condemn Me?
Indeed they will all grow old like a garment;
The moth will eat them up.
“Who among you fears the LORD?
Who obeys the voice of His Servant?
Who walks in darkness
And has no light?
Let him trust in the name of the LORD
And rely upon his God.
Look, all you who kindle a fire,
Who encircle yourselves with sparks:
Walk in the light of your fire and in the sparks you have kindled—
This you shall have from My hand:
You shall lie down in torment.*

The cause of the severity of this economic winter we are now entering is simply we are trying to build a society without out absolutes, a world were everything is relative to time and situations. The deity in all those situations is supposed to be the self governing self. This makes the assumption that we are all good people and evolving without effort to a higher plain. That is not truth that is sickness, or narcissism.

The truth that we are not masters of the universe, will be the lesson of this winter. The torment that will cause will be considerable to all humanity. The truth is that if we look to God's grace in this winter, it can be an eternal learning experience. Another minor Hebrew prophet speaks about another winter and God's grace through a very trying economic time and puts life into this proper perspective:

*Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
The LORD God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills.
Habakkuk 3:17-19*