

Recession or Depression

By Jeff S. Smith

As pen meets paper, the entire world is struggling to break free from a terrible economic recession, the causes of which will be debated for decades, but which surely include greed and dishonesty.

Some have even questioned the potential for another depression, not unlike the one our grandparents endured in the 1930s, when only a world war was enough to rescue the victors' economies. Recession and depression are discouraging themes, but the spiritual state of our world has been slipping in that direction even longer.

For decades, we have witnessed a spiritual recession in the currency of biblical interest, even among the people of God. An unhealthy collision between itching ears and glib doctrine produced a generation that counted religion to be a matter of entertainment and recreation, of almost absolute tolerance and compromise even where conviction should have stood fast.

And little wonder, for Paul warned long ago that, "in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared" (1Tim. 4:1-2). Biblical mastery receded and the joy of the Holy Spirit was misinterpreted to mean fun. Worship had to be fun. Bible class had to be fun, and if it wasn't, it was augmented with snacks and prizes or replaced altogether by video games and dodge ball.

Like profit-hungry bankers, certain preachers and elders contributed to this recession of reason by satisfying the ear-tickling demand. Conditions in the time of Hosea were revisited. To the teachers, God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you" (4:6). God's rejection, however, is too subtle for the apathetic observer to notice. Sermons were drained of scriptural content so that humor and philosophy could better display the preacher's charisma (1Cor. 2:1-2). The work of the church tilted away from the soul and toward the social. Sin was seldom identified so to avoid alienating the sinner; the recession deepened beneath the surface.

Gradually, this spiritual recession became more pronounced and seemingly irreversible. Moral poverty came upon the saints "like a robber, and want like an armed man" (Prov. 24:33-34). We entered a self-inflicted Biblical dust bowl – "not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord" (Amos 8:11). Here we are.

The Great Depression ended as nations ramped up for war, but now our world suffers from a much more personal form. Only when the soldiers of Christ renew their militance for evangelism and discipleship will this depression show signs of abating. "Fight the good fight of the faith" (1Tim. 6:12). "Preach the word" (2Tim. 4:2).

Trivial Pursuits

By Zeke Flores

Some time ago the board game "Trivial Pursuit" was introduced on the market. The game, which now has a 25th anniversary edition, became a huge success and is still enjoyed by people young and old. One can play the board game, an online version,

a version for various electronic game systems including the X-Box, Play Station, and Wii, and even one for the iPod. It's been two TV game shows and even the subject of a TV movie. The game has turned into a reliable money-maker for its manufacturer Hasbro and when you go to their website, you can browse through three pages containing some 22 Trivial Pursuit related games and items. Basically, each player advances by correctly answering general knowledge and popular culture questions in different categories that are easy, medium, or hard. I've played the game and it's a hoot.

However, my concern is not about a harmless game but whether people, Christians specifically, spend too much time in other forms of "trivial pursuit."

If you've been a Christian for any length of time, chances are you've heard a sermon or two about being faithful, having conviction, and forging ahead towards heaven. And, you'll probably hear many more like them as your life progresses. The reason is simple: We are too easily distracted.

The Bible mentions some things of weighty concern that we ought to pay attention to, but warns us that those important things can take our focus away from what should be our main purpose. Among them are family (1Cor. 7:32-35), household duties (Luke 10:38-42), and business (Matt. 13:22). While these are important priorities, could it be that Christians lose their direction for far lesser things?

In our recreation driven culture, more and more people expect "me" time. We want to make sure we have fun and so we buy video games, DVDs, computers, ATV's, plan vacations, go to the movies, etc. None of these is inherently wrong, but at what cost do we indulge our "need" for recreation? Do we sacrifice time with God through Bible study and prayer for that ever important "me" time? Jesus warned about those who are "choked with worries and riches, and the pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14).

The same could be said about worldly Christians who pursue a relationship with the opposite sex only to fall prey to the temptation of physical attraction. One of the saddest things to witness would be a young single girl coming forward at church with a slightly bulging belly and the sad confession that follows. Paul reminds, "... this is the will of God, your sanctification, that is that you abstain from sexual immorality" (1Thes. 4:3). Yet too many people, young and not so young, fall into the pit of satisfying this fleeting pleasure that sanctification is all but lost.

Other "trivial pursuits" could be mentioned: selfishness, covetousness, ego, social position, and disrespect (Prov. 28:22-27) to name a few. But the warnings about keeping our focus sharp and our perspective clear ring loudly in Scripture: "Seek first His kingdom and His righteousness" (Matt. 6:33), "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven ... for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:19-21), "One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD and to meditate in His temple" (Psalm 27:4), "... one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13-14),

Playing Trivial Pursuit is fun, but allowing the trivial pursuits of this life to overshadow our purpose as God's people is quite another thing. Let's be a purposeful

people and reach forward to heaven showing God we love Him with "all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).

A Moments Wisdom

It isn't your position, but your disposition that determines your happiness.

Some people believe everything that is whispered to them.

The best way to save face is to keep the lower end of it closed.

The man who deserts truth in trifles can not be trusted in matters of importance.

A sharp tongue does not necessarily indicate a keen mind.

The devil is not afraid of the Bible that has dust on it.

No one ever graduates from Bible study until he meets the Author face to face.

Christians may not see eye to eye, but they can walk arm in arm.

Let us endeavor so to live that when we come to die even the undertaker will be sorry.

The three things most difficult are: to keep a secret, to forget an injury, and to make good use of leisure.