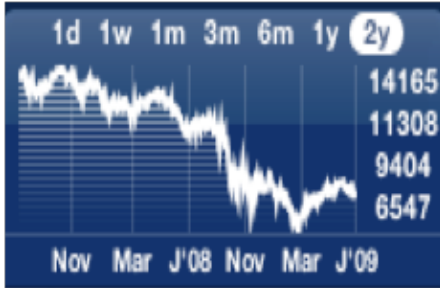


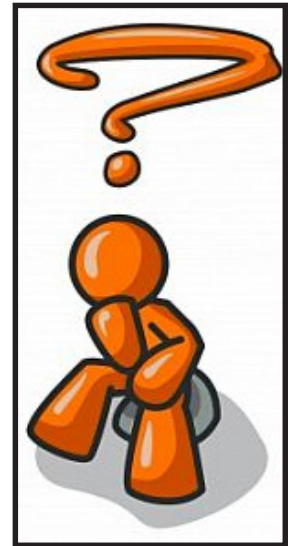
What About ... the Recession

By DR. DAVID A. DEWITT

Consider Jesus' statement: *Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God* (Luke 6:20). First, notice that the sermon in Luke 6 is about the *poor*, not *the poor in spirit* (Matthew 5:3). It may be that the poor are blessed because they are more apt to be poor in spirit. Nonetheless, in Luke 6, He is talking about being poor. To emphasize it, Jesus also said: *But woe to you who are rich, for you are receiving your comfort in full* (Luke 6:24).



And that's a consistent theme with Jesus. He told us about the rich man who is in Hades because *he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day* (Luke 16:19). He said: *it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God* (Matthew 19:24). And He lived that way. He had no house, no extra clothes, and no means of transportation. When He died, there was no inheritance squabble over His estate.



I suspect most Christians in America would say (or think): "I'm not rich (relatively), but I've been blessed by God." I would like to suggest that in terms of economic prosperity here on earth, neither one is true.

The word for *blessing* here (and in Matthew 5) means: *happy, or a gift which comes from God that makes us happy*. Israel was promised physical blessings on earth in the land, if they obeyed the Law (Deuteronomy 28:1-6). But there is nothing in the New Testament which promises physical blessings on earth for the Church. For example, in the context of our verse, Jesus said: *Be glad in that day [when you are poor, hungry, hated, etc.] and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven* (Luke 6:23). There is simply no evidence in the New Testament that God blesses Christians with physical or economic prosperity here on earth. God is making us holy, but not necessarily happy, here on earth.

Are we poor, or anyway relatively not rich, in economic, prosperous terms? Well, times are tough—economically. Unemployment is high. Some have lost their homes. Many business owners have scaled back or lost half or more of their businesses.

Yeah ... but. What about ... the fact that at the beginning of the twentieth century the average American lifespan was 41 years and now it's 77 years? Plagues from polio, smallpox, measles, rickets, and pre-antibiotic diseases have been defeated. In the year 2000, 13 percent of American home purchases were of second homes. Golf-course com-



munities, pleasure boats, huge SUVs with heated leather seats and built-in video, expensive motorcycles, vacation motor homes, custom-painted snowmobiles with a GPS, and a multitude of other big ticket items have been, and still are, being marketed, not to the wealthy top of society but to the middle of both the American and European society. Inflation-adjusted real per-capita American income has more than doubled since 1960, meaning that the typical person now commands twice the buying power of his father or mother in the year 1960. For example, when McDonalds opened their first hamburger stand in the 1950s, a cheeseburger cost the typical wage earner half an hour of work. Today, the same cheeseburger costs three minutes of work. Food, clothes, homes, cars, nearly everything we purchase today is less expensive than it was in the 1950s. Only health care and college education cost more today in work-hour terms. Men and women of middle-class standards in the United States and the European Union now live better than 99.4 percent of the human beings who have ever existed.



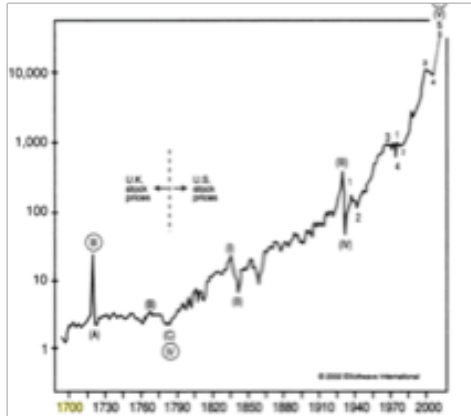
In his 1958 book "The Affluent Society," John Kenneth Galbraith declared we had reached a materialistic summit because the typical family possessed a home, a car, and a television, and included one person who had graduated from college. Gregg Easterbrook, in his book "The Progress Paradox," reports: "One generation after "The Affluent

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Society” declared that America would not get much richer, average real income in the United States has more than doubled, huge houses with three cars and a wide-screen television have become common, the majority of children attend college. Per-capita income is up, “real” income is up. So is longevity, home size, cars per

driver, phone calls made annually, trips taken annually, highest degree earned. IQ scores, just about every objective indicator of social welfare has trended upward on a pretty much uninterrupted basis for two generations” (pp. 80-84). [The graph is stock prices since the year 1700.]



Someone recently told me, after hearing the above statement, “But Michigan is worse off than it was 5 years ago.” True, many have lost their jobs. But then again, I had a serious eye surgery, that saved the vision in my right eye, a surgery which did not exist 4 years ago. I am developing another serious eye condition which physicians are treating today with a surgical procedure that did not exist one year ago. There is a new i-phone, computers, TVs, food, clothes, shoes, kitchen articles, and all the stuff at Wal-Mart is better and cheaper in work-hour adjusted real income. Even if you are out of work and worse off than you were 5 years ago, you are probably living better socio-economically speaking than Nebuchadnezzar, Caesar, the rulers of the Ming Dynasty, and the Pharaohs of Egypt. My guess is that if the Apostle Peter were blindfolded and transported into the house of the average American Christian today, then allowed

to look around, he’d think he was in the palace of some aristocrat, nobleman, or king.

So (as Francis Schaeffer once put it) “How Should We Then Live?” Here are my suggestions:

1. Understand that we are not living in economic hard times. Our global society is just making whatever adjustments it needs to, as we continue our opulent lifestyle progressing ever onward toward the antichrist’s wealthy immoral Babylon of Revelation 18. And no, Obama’s astronomical deficit inflationary spending will not stop it. Remember, most western nations have the same problem. But the West is still filled with constantly improving goods and services which people will figure out a way to buy and pay for.
2. Use the technology, but do not seek to be wealthy or live in luxury. Admittedly, “wealth” and “luxury” are relative terms, and everybody has to decide what that means for them in their situation.
3. And, of course, no one should impose their standards on someone else. Everybody must apply the concept of avoiding luxury to their own particulars.
4. See your wealth as a responsibility, not a blessing. Nearly all of us have some form of wealth. God puts His wealth where He chooses, and we all have different amounts of it. The more we have, the more we are responsible for. God did not give it to us to spend it on ourselves or use it to live in luxury. Remember, Paul wrote this: *For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs* (1 Timothy 6:7-10).