"'Grexit' and Growth Fears Spark Flight to Safety"

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If Wall Street and the financial press are truly good at anything, it would be coming up with pithy abbreviations. First, we had the "BRIC," which was shorthand for Brazil, Russia, India and China. These were supposed to be the four emerging market growth dynamos that would power the world economy for the next decade and beyond.

Why these four and not, say, Mexico, Indonesia or Turkey? Mostly because the "BRICMIT" doesn't sound as cool in marketing literature.

Lest you think I'm joking, I am completely serious. The only thing these four countries had in common when the term "BRIC" was invented was that their abbreviations made a word with a nice ring to it. (Of course, today they have disappointing rates of growth in common, but that is a topic best saved for another day.)

Next, we had the "PIIGS," consisting of Portugal, Ireland, Italy, Greece and Spain. These were the European countries hardest hit by the 2008 meltdown and subsequent sovereign debt crisis. Unlike the BRICs, the PIIGS actually had quite a bit in common. They all suffered from disturbingly high national debts and a lack of investor confidence in their abilities to pay it.

And now we have the "Grexit," or Greek exit from the Eurozone. It's difficult to handicap the odds on whether or when Greece might be kicked out of the Eurozone, but I would not at all be surprised to pick up a copy of tomorrow's *Wall Street Journal* and find out that it happened overnight.

With all the talk of Greece dominating the financial headlines, investors are rightly wondering, "What would a Greek exit mean to my portfolio?"

Though a legitimate question, it is ultimately the *wrong* question. You shouldn't spend an inordinate amount of time worrying about specific events like a Greek meltdown because you simply can't anticipate every possibility. Think about the Japanese tsunami and nuclear disaster last year. "Acts of God" like that can't be anticipated, and neither can "acts of man" like a Grexit.

Instead of focusing on whatever event or trendy acronym has caught the attention of the media, investors should focus on the big picture. This means asking questions that you might not be accustomed to answering:

How much income do I need in retirement to maintain my lifestyle, and how much do I need my investment portfolio to generate?

If stocks were to suffer another bear market like 2007-2009 or 2000-2003, would my retirement be at risk? Do I have downside protection in place?

If the income from my investments covers my living expenses today, will it still cover them in five years? Am I protected from inflation? What about deflation?

If you don't have answers to questions like these, you should. In the end, our primary goal in investing is not to simply "beat the market" or generate some specific rate of return. It is to protect and grow the net worth that you have spent a lifetime building.

In the very conceivable event that you (literally) see Athens burning in the weeks ahead, keep the big picture in mind.

Sincerely,

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