"Those who have been intoxicated with power ... can never willingly abandon it."
—Edmund Burke

Four More Years
Yesterday, January 20, 2005, witnessed the second inauguration of President George W. Bush, a costly affair to celebrate the continued, peaceful renewal of legitimate, executive power over the government of these United States. Except for a few lame and childish protests by poor-loser leftists, everything seemed to have gone without a hitch. The First Lady even received praise for her designer dresses, unlike 2001, in which the press haughtily panned her taste.

Commercials for financial services companies always include a proviso similar to, "Past performance is not an indication of future results." This is true of chief executives as well. Presidents' second terms have historically failed to live up to expectations, whether because of scandal, stiff congressional opposition, assassination or illness, or lame-duck status. Momentum is lost, "political capital" is squandered, political machinations are hatched and discovered, the President's legacy becomes all important, and soon the electorate is eager to throw him out and fill his place with someone new and different, usually from the other party.

Will Bush follow in the footsteps of other recent second-term Presidents like Bill Clinton, Ronald Reagan, and Richard Nixon? Or will he somehow avoid the multitude of potholes and obstacles already strewn along his path? History favors the prediction that he will stumble.
Bush and Clinton provide contrasting styles that end up remarkably similar in their effects. Clinton, a "New" Democrat, campaigned as a centrist and governed to the left. The "compassionate" Republican Bush, on the other hand, campaigned as a rightist and governed to the center. In other words, both were essentially hypocritical in their efforts to gain power, and their governance revealed them for what they are. A New Democrat is simply a Democrat who lies about his liberalism, and a compassionate conservative is a liberal Republican. Either way, America continues on the road to socialism, but with Bush, at a slower speed.

His first-term "successes" prove this to be the case. Bush adopted liberal Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy's education bill as his own, styling it the "No Child Left Behind Act," and now we have, in effect, nationalized schools. The prescription drug fiasco dragged America another step toward nationalized medicine. Finally, the Patriot Act did more to aggregate power to the federal government than any single bill or executive order in generations. These are not the accomplishments of a conservative.

Truly conservative positions on these issues would be:

- Relinquishing all federal control over public schools and returning it to the states and local municipalities.
- Getting the federal government out of the pharmaceutical industry and encouraging free-market competition to drive the price of health care down.
- Confirming and guarding the liberties delineated in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Even the War on Terror is not a conservative effort. As a sovereign nation, America has the right to defend itself against aggression both at home and abroad (the conservative position), but the Bush Administration's invasion of Iraq, though "noble" in its professed intentions, runs contrary to traditional American foreign policy, which leaned heavily toward non-intervention, even to a kind of isolationism. Obviously, America's status as the lone superpower has changed its abilities and responsibilities, but pre-emptive war, meddling in the internal affairs of other sovereign nations, and shaping behaviors through force are liberalism to its ultimate extent.

The next four years will tell the tale. Mr. Bush has promised to use his political capital, his mandate from the American people, to push through more conservative legislation. However, the country—and the Congress—are still divided, and his chances of ramming a truly conservative political agenda through both House and Senate are slim. The outlook appears to favor four more years of conservative talk and, after the smoke
clears in the back rooms of the White House and Capitol, moderate-to-liberal action.

When Israel rejected God and asked for a king "like all the nations" (1 Samuel 8:5), God inspired Samuel to "solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them" (verse 9). So Samuel said:

He will take your sons and appoint them for his own chariots. . . . He will appoint captains over his thousands . . . to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and some to make his weapons of war. . . . He will take your daughters to be perfumers, cooks, and bakers. And he will take the best of your fields . . . and give them to his servants. And he will take a tenth of your grain and your vintage, and give it to his officers and servants. And he will take your manservants and your maidservants and your finest young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take a tenth of your sheep. And you will be his servants. (verses 11-17, emphasis added)

This is the natural progression of human government. It may begin in liberty, but it ends in slavery. How far along this spectrum the U.S. is remains to be seen, but even our most "conservative" Commanders-in-Chief have only slowed the pace. Keep this in mind over the next four years.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

The Right Use of Power
by John W. Ritenbaugh

Of all creation, man is the only creature made in God's image and given dominion over the rest of creation. When God breathed in the spirit of man (Genesis 2:7) to enable thinking, feeling, and creating, He imbued God-like characteristics, giving mankind the capability of subduing, controlling, and directing the rest of creation—a power not given to animals (Genesis 1:26, 28). With dominion comes responsibility to maintain (Genesis 2:15). The sad history of mankind shows that he has badly mismanaged his power, bringing about disease, war, and famine. Such people will be brought into account (Revelation 11:18). God's Spirit enables us to direct this power in a responsible, godly manner.
Globalism, as it comes in contact with tribalism, often causes conflict because the two systems are incompatible. Charles Whitaker also explains how globalism, China and prophecy collide in the last days.