

"Preach the gospel at all times. If necessary, use words. [Often incorrectly attributed to Francis of Assisi.]"

—Anonymous

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The Gospel of Freedom and Democracy

Much ink has been spilled of late about President George W. Bush's foreign policy initiatives and the recent "successes" in "exporting democracy" to those areas of [the world](#) that are known for overbearing and corrupt leadership. The Taliban have been unseated in Afghanistan, and free elections were recently held. Due to popular pressure at home, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak has recently agreed to more democratic reform. The Palestinians have democratically elected the only real contender for Yassir Arafat's position, Mahmoud Abbas. The people of Iraq have likewise taken to the polls this year for the first time in decades when there was more than one name on the ballot. Lastly, Syria appears to be somewhere between a partial and a complete withdrawal from Lebanon, and the possibility of a "free" Lebanon does not seem so farfetched anymore. The seeds of democracy, it would seem, have been planted in the Middle East.

President Bush's supporters are veritably crowing as news of "regime change" reaches America from various corners. Even his critics cannot entirely overlook the fact that change is in the air in a number of recalcitrant nations. Since the events of September 11, 2001, President Bush has been propounding the idea that, since Islamic terrorism cannot be met on a

standard field of battle, the next best thing is to change those governments and cultures that knowingly assist or encourage Islamic terrorism. His answer to militant Islam is the preaching of [the gospel](#) of freedom and democracy.

Is this reasonable? Can it work? What happens when American culture and values are urged as the answer to extremism? Conservative columnist Cal Thomas observes:

These fanatics [Muslim fascists] believe the United States, Britain and the rest of the West are the ones in bondage. They note our promiscuity, our abortions, our obsession with homosexuality, our television, our provocative way of dressing and they wonder who is really free?

Exactly what is being promoted? American liberty seems to be synonymous with American license. The common decency of the culture has devolved to the lowest common denominator. The ideals we espouse are overshadowed by the public example of how we live. For good or ill, John Winthrop's "city on a hill" imagery has come to pass in the United States—but the light it is emitting is feeble at best.

The adage, "Charity begins at home," has never been more relevant. If our own house is not in order, we can never [hope](#) to lead by example. No institution—nation, business, school, church, family—can successfully promote its ideas if its core is sick. It can influence and coerce, but it cannot inspire. Other nations envy the wealth and power of the United States, but it is not out of respect for America's righteousness that they seek to emulate her.

America has never recovered from the moral and cultural earthquakes of the 60s and 70s. As the Islamists painfully point out, we have plenty of problems at home. We have killed more of our children than any terrorist could dream of doing. We are draining our economy through deficit spending and credit card debt more effectively than any terrorist strike could. We are denigrating the family—the foundation of any society—at every turn. With such symptoms as these staring us in the face, it is only through hubris that we believe we can teach others a better way to live. Our first priority has to be

putting our nation—our schools, our churches, our families, our marriages, ourselves—back on track before we can hope to be effective in teaching the world a better way to live.

Our Savior tells us that we have to correct our own vision before we can help anybody else:

And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, "Let me remove the speck from your eye"; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye. ([Matthew 7:3-5](#))

Whether the institution consists of one man or hundreds of millions, the principle remains the same: There will not be *true* public victory until there is first private victory. The moral and spiritual sickness must be rooted out first. The foundation must be solid. The message must be correct—and it must be practiced before it can be preached. In fact, practicing it *will* be preaching it.

President Bush's foreign policy *is* effecting change in the world. But if it is done through coercion rather than example, the resulting fruit will not be good.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[What Is the Work of God Now? \(Part One\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The preaching the gospel to the world, held by some to be the only identifying mark of the church, is at best the beginning of a long, complex process of creating disciples and godly offspring through steady feeding and encouragement to overcome (feeding the flock). God, as a responsible

parent, is not one-dimensional in assigning responsibilities to His children, but frequently shifts gears, changing circumstances, giving His begotten children a well-rounded education. God - not Satan or an incompetent ministry - engineered the massive scattering of the church of God to move it away from pernicious and fatal Laodiceanism. We need to adjust to the new situation, realizing that God has engineered these events with the real work of God in mind: making man in His image and reproducing Himself.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Get the Church Ready!](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

What should the church be doing during this time of scattering and doctrinal confusion? What did Herbert Armstrong say must be done? Is the gospel limited to preaching to the unconverted?

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