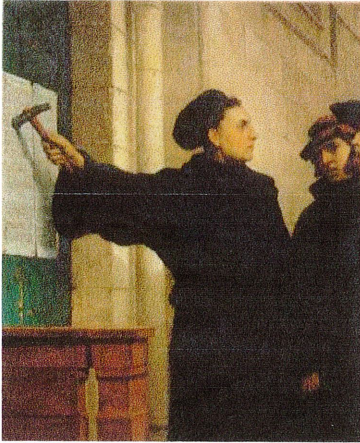


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From Reformation Day to Election Day: a Legacy



When Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the door of the Wittenberg Church in Germany on October 31, 1517, no one knew the cataclysmic fruit that would grow from that tiny seed. After all, they were 95 points he only wanted to discuss; inconsistencies he saw in the logic of the religious leaders of his day. Most importantly, he saw inconsistencies with the Scriptures, especially in the matter of indulgences (buying forgiveness).

"#35 – it is not in accordance with Christian doctrines to preach and teach that those who buy off souls, or purchase confessional licenses, have no need to repent of their own sins; #36 – Any Christian whatsoever, who is truly repentant, enjoys plenary remission from penalty and guilt, and this is given him without letters of indulgence."

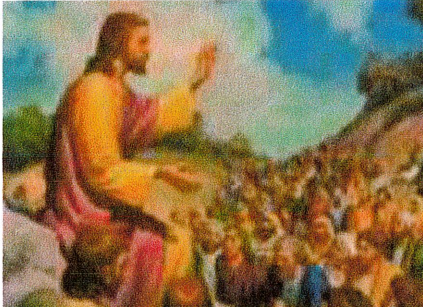
The eve of All Saints Day – or Halloween as we call it today – was a time to remember the great sacrifices of the saints who had gone before us. However, it had become corrupted with people praying to the dead and desiring to purchase forgiveness for those in purgatory. The evening before was filled with all sorts of traditions inherited from the Druids who celebrated the festival of Samhain (death) which the Catholic holiday had been formed to offset in the first place. Luther's subsequent conversion and his stand for individual salvation by faith alone was the cornerstone of the Reformation being handed down as the doctrine of the *priesthood of the believer*.

The mediation of Christ to the individual, without interference from religious or civil government was the theological seed that would restore the right of *free suffrage* in both church and state, replacing the appointment of leaders by those in power. Not since the Hebrew Republic had changed to a limited monarchy around 1050 BC had the world witnessed free elections for the choice of their magistrates. As Americans, we often take our liberties for granted and assume that they are common to all nations. Nothing could be further from the truth, however. In America, free elections were practiced as the direct fruit of the theology of the reformation and priesthood of the believer.

Election Day in America began in 1633, and the Charter of 1691 under William and Mary designated the last Wednesday of May as the day it was to be celebrated. There was a parade led by the clergy and candidates. A Pastor was selected by the civil authorities to preach to the candidates, and then picnics followed and the people would vote. Having travelled quite a distance, it was an all day (or several day) affair. The questions we must ask are simple – *why was the sermon the focal point of election day? Why were its contents spread near and far? What link does it have to Reformation Day?*



The theological link is not hard to find. Christ's role as both *Priest* and *King* makes Him the spiritual head of both church and state. The doctrine of election means that Heaven has chosen us (John 15:16; Ephesians 1:4; Colossians 3:12) and thus our responsibility is to *affirm His Choice*. This is neither fatalism (no responsibility to man) or mechanism (humans as robots), but simply that God is Sovereign and thus He initiates and we respond. As Christ is our High Priest, so He is our King, and thus we are to consent freely to our rulers on earth *affirming what we believe is His choice based on His Word*. Revelation 1:4-6 indicates that believers are both *kings and priests* and thus God's government in church and state works through the consent of individuals.

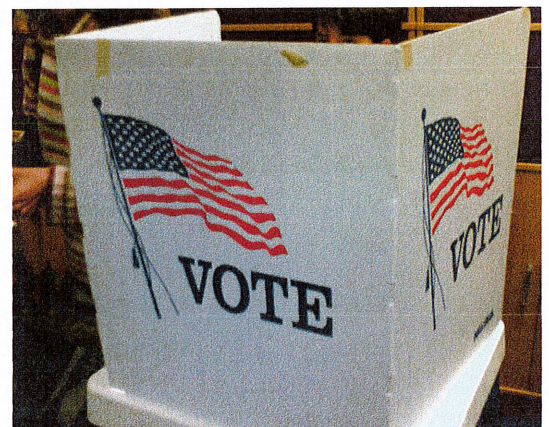


Jesus taught that believers are *the salt of the earth and the light of the world* (Matthew 5:13-16). A nation is blessed or cursed by the condition of God's people within it (see Psalm 33:12). The legacy of we have in America is a treasure often ignored or misunderstood. Reformation Day bore greater fruit in America than Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries. One of its fruits was the free election of our leaders in church and state. Because we are the salt and light of the world, greater responsibility is placed on us to be good examples.

*“When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice,
but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn.”* (Proverbs 29:2)

There are about 60 million evangelical believers in America, as far as we can tell. These are those who believe in Jesus and that the Bible is the Word of God. However, at least 24 million as of the year 2000 were not even registered to vote! Only 15 million even voted in 2000! The results, by default, were obvious. In 2010, by contrast, over 28.8 million went to the polls, nearly doubling the impact in the civil realm just by their active involvement. It is clear that we face two major challenges when linking ideas like the *priesthood of the believer* (Reformation Day) with the *responsibility of the believer* (Election Day). These two enemies are apathy and ignorance. We must be active and better informed as to what the Word of God teaches and requires in our leaders and the impact will be great and a blessing to all people – not just those who are Christians – for liberty is a civil blessing to all.

As believer's, we must study a candidate's record and not just their rhetoric. This is what Jesus taught when he compared the two sons – one who did the will of his father, and one who said he would but did not (Matthew 21:28-32). This means we discern the “best of our choices” based on God's criteria of whether they have demonstrated an ability to govern, fear God (as their Creator, not necessarily Christ as their Lord), honest and hate dishonest gain (rejecting privileges), all based on Exodus 18:21 and Deuteronomy 1:13 as instruction from God's Word. The fact that we often do not have real choices is indicative of the judgment of God upon our poor involvement as believers in the past.



May we see the link between Reformation Day and Election Day, counting it as a blessing of liberty that we can choose our rulers. In spite of the opposition of those who would reduce us to slavery, let us heed the words of Jonas Clark of Lexington in his sermon at the inauguration of the Massachusetts State Constitution in 1781 “...these colonies hesitated not a moment, but... greatly dared to be free! ...All may yet be lost, if we rise not as one man to the noble cause... Forbid it, righteous Heaven!”