# Principle #10: Liberty

Throughout the scriptures the theme of liberty reverbates. It includes being set free from oppression, the sins of others against us, set free from our personal sins; set free economically; set free from slavery.

### The Jubilee (Lev 25:8-17)

The Jubilee, seven times seven years or every 50th year, took these values a step further, redistributing the sources of wealth, the means of production of the society. It was a time of equalizing.

It is synonymous with the year of liberty. Slaves are to be set free. Freedom is inherent in the gospel message.

The year of Jubilee was the great re-distributor of the land for the people of Israel. Every 50 years, the land must be returned to the original tribes, clans and families to whom God had given it. It is these tribes that see that the land is distributed justly and nurtured in such a way as to bear fruit. If the land is sold it is only for the period of time remaining until the year of Jubilee. All debts were cancelled, all obligations were nullified. It was the time of celebration. A day when all could have the same start with the same resources. Redistribution of the means of production is inherent in the gospel message. Debts are to be cancelled: Economic freedom is inherent in the gospel message. Celebration is inherent in the gospel message.

#### A Liberating Gospel

The command to blow the trumpet to announce the Jubilee has never ceased. Wherever we declare this good news we create the chaos of liberation, and with liberty comes celebration. Whenever people experience conversion, and the entrance of the Holy Spirit into their lives we find this great release of joy, this immersion in the Holy Spirit can be uncontainable. Whenever Jesus healed or delivered, whenever Pentecostal brothers and sisters heal or deliver there is unending joy.

This is also the reality of the bride of Christ, the historic church. I recall when I was setting up our first Protestant missionary apostolic order in New Zealand, tracking down a rotund Anglican Franciscan Friar. He was the epitome of what we consider St Francis was, always joking, enjoying life in the midst of chosen poverty. To be set free from slavery is surely to become a celebrating, worshipping, joy-filled person. The Jewish calendar had three and then four holidays where people were to celebrate. In a schitzophrenic post-modern society epitomised by Madonna, how desperate is the need of true celebration. And indeed the Sunday worship and feasting of our four thousand churches reverbates weekly through our communities in New Zealand.

And when those who are more staid bring these principles of liberation into the structures of society, the groans of the people also are transformed into celebration. Does this mean we are to espouse Liberation Theology? That theology is different to the liberty, to the freedom that Jesus talks of here. But it has its roots in these passages. It builds from both Marxism and Jesus, so when we work alongside those trained in its thinking we find ourselves aligning with the good of those who would incarnate among the poor and seek justice through people movements and structural reform, and rejecting the bitterness and social analysis of the evil of Marxism. As Christians we are to outdo such commitment.

#### An Ecological Gospel

The Jubilee is the restoration of the land, a restructuring of the human-land relationship. We are to manage the land not to abuse it. To manage, to steward, is to care for, to protect, as well as to develop the productivity of the land. Jesus aim is to bring all of creation out of its bondage and set it free (Rom 8:21). As the good news of the Jubilee is preached, so the land is allowed to rest. Christians restore the land, they manage the land. But more than that Christians wait for the promised land, the return of the Messiah to rule for 1000 years and bring right relationships to the land.

Evangelism this decade will hinge on Christian leadership of urban and rural environmental issues. As we are working to establish housing for the poor, or to enable a community to raise a sustainable food supply, the reason for our care for the land becomes the center of our conversation.

The way that the created order can be reinstated to God’s original purpose depends upon the proclamation of the Good News (Mark 16:15). Creation groans until the message of the gospel has penetrated to every nation, every person (Rom 8:19, 20).

#### A Celebrating Gospel

In the Jubilee, life becomes a celebration. Even within the simplicity of Jesus’ lifestyle, he did not consider things as evil. Jesus knew how to enjoy dining with the rich, yet for the sake of the Kingdom of God, he chose to come to a family who could not afford the dedication offering of the poor (Luke 2:24). He was accused of being a party-goer - and he was. He loved life and people. This is where he did his evangelism. For as the proclaimer of Jubilee, he was calling people to celebrate.

Our task is to bring the joy of Christ into situations of darkness, the hope of Christ into situations of despair.

#### Rest Reinterpreted

Both Paul in the epistles and Hebrews reinterpret the principle of rest dramatically. Paul speaks of some holding one day sacred while others in their new found freedom hold all days as being holy (Rom 14:5-6). Some would understand him as not speaking of the Sabbath, but of other holy days. Others take this as a liberty to hold all days alike.

Hebrews 4:1-11 speaks of entering our spiritual rest, no longer striving to earn salvation or acceptance, but enjoying the free grace of a salvation bestowed. It is an extension of theme of rest to a perpetual state of rest. As with the rest of the Jubilee principles we are now in continuous Jubilee.

These open the door to a diversity of Christian interpretations. Yet the normative view is to keep Sunday (not a Biblical norm, but a historic cultural choice from Roman times based on celebrating the day of resurrection) as a day of revival through worship (spiritual rest), recreation (physical rest) and restoration (emotional rest), and to seek to sustain national enforcement of this day as beneficial for all – believers or not.

### Liberty and Limitations to Government

There are limits to the ruling of humanity over other humans that derive from the first chapter of the scriptures. In them is defined a fundamentally different relationship between man and man, woman and woman to that of men and women to creation. The emphasis of our relationship to creation is an emphasis of management, rulership, as vice-regents, in the same manner as the Governor-General of New Zealand represents the interests of the British Crown in New Zealand. The emphasis of our social relationships is that of care, brotherhood, equality, justice.

Because we are born in his image, each person has an immortal soul and a conscience. Each person is accountable to God to be his brother’s keeper. Thus, we are to develop societies that care for each one, protecting the image of God in each one, being accountable for all around us. This is love. We are to create loving societies.

During the dispute between the prophet Samuel and the people about importing the style of a Monarchy into the relatively democratic system of judges and tribes - the theocracy - in 1 & 2 Samuel, we find the prophet speaking of the dangers of centralisation of power around a monarchy, of the oppression by the monarch of the people, of the potential to enslave the people, of the increased taxation. There is a critical principle here of the diffusion of power to the people. A people is as strong as its small organisations at its base - be they small economic units, small political units, or networks of religious societies. These diffuse power and enable processes for emergence of leadership that understands the people’s issues.

Diffusion of Power

A people is as strong as the small organizations at its base - be they small economic units, small political units, or networks of religious societies.

This is a principle violated by both Capitalism and Socialism. Across Western Capitalist nations over the last 60 years, increasing levels of taxation have fuelled growth of the governmental money supplies and taxation has risen from 5% to over 40% for most OECD countries, increasingly centralising power away from local communities. This requires resistance, a discipleship that stands against these powers, as Jesus stood against the abuses of merchandise in the temple.

Similarly the centralizing of power in multinationals (that are accountable to none except their boards and shareholders, and rarely have significant accountability as to local community consequences of their actions on the environment), is an ongoing violation of this principle that requires prophetic resistance, an unmasking and standing against these powers.

#### Limits to Sin: The Need for Regulation

The sinfulness of individuals is multiplied in larger societal contexts. Collectivity magnifies certain sins. The development in Leviticus and Exodus of various legal structures indicates processes for godly limitations, for punishment of crime. Effective feedback loops, and rapid responses to issues in contexts without corruption are essential. When systems evolve with incremental regulatory changes to deal with changing dynamics, nations are healthy. When there is easy feedback from people to legislators, and diffused power within societies, responses to issues can be rapid, hence the society moves forward in an integrated manner.

Efficient bureaucracy or good governance is recognised to advance national economies. Significant levels of governmental management have been critical to the efficiency of first world countries. But overly excessive bureaucratisation is a significant factor in sustaining poverty and dualism within societies. It is considered by some as the direct cause of sustained poverty in many Latin countries that were still emerging from mercantilism till three decades ago (de Soto, 2003) for example.

In New Zealand, we now rank number 1 in terms of our institutional efficiency and number 4 in terms of health and educational institutions globally, based on criteria heavily influenced by American perceptions of efficiency. But following the model of over-bureaucratisation due to excessive litigation of the US, the 2016 Proposed Free trade agreement will also bring the intrusion of American lawyers and hence greatly expand the bureaucratisation and legalisation of New Zealand society, and will likely drop New Zealand from being the 18th most competitive society in the world (World Economic Forum, 2015).

#### Limits to Sin: Limits to Government Power

New Zealand has faced a rapid erosion of checks and balances that sustain governmental accountability in the last decades, beginning with the elimination of the upper house of Parliament. This is evidenced in the consistent refusal by governments to listen to the voice of the people in referenda (Helen Clarke’s government listened to no referenda that Christians brought to her government), and in the rapid swings between conflicting governing and economic strategies that incoming New Zealand governments have imposed on the people without consent.

Rogernomics was such a swing towards the right, seeking to minimise government involvement, reduce bureaucratisation, eliminate complex compliance costs. It did so, however, without significant concern for serious social costs involved in the rapid process of change. Similarly, Helen Clark’s Socialism, its goals defined 30 years earlier, and honed by international socialist values sought to expand bureaucracies, and among other things entered deeply into family liberties based on the socialist value of State-controlled family dynamics and child raising.

It made no apology for increasing levels of taxation in New Zealand to the fourth highest in the OECD, even when there were regular surpluses, and had no compunction about distributing some of these to the middle class, not because of poverty, but because of the consistent Socialist belief in the government as the redistributor of wealth. It overly committed to free trade - particularly opening the doors to free trade with China, prior to China floating its currency at realistic levels. This crashed sectors of New Zealand’s economy – clothing production and shoe manufacturing to name two. Perhaps these were sunset industries that could never continue to compete globally. Perhaps workers could have been retrained. Schemes were developed but have not worked in any countries. As industries are lost there is an overall loss of employment, though the theories predict movement to higher level industries, few can make the transitions.

Globally, there has been a rapid increase of centralised bureaucracies in both capitalist and communist societies. With increasing urbanisation and the growth of computerised control technology all countries have some form of central planning. This has clearly been an asset throughout the 20th Century in the abolition of poverty and redistribution of wealth. But the scriptural warning to limit such governmental powers has largely been lost. In OECD countries taxation rises yearly, and is now often over 40% of peoples’ income. Along with that, the increase of bureaucratisation is immense. Helen Clark’s government added thousands of bureaucrats, and increased the percentage of taxation by 8% over 9 years of power. As in Egypt the people begin to groan under such burdens. Christians have consistently called for limitations to governmental controls.

### Civil and Religious Freedom from Oppression

Our principle number 10 of *freedom and celebration* has been the basis for Christian opposition to governmental oppression globally for two millennia. There is a poem where one of my Baptist forbears, a certain Gryg, is named as part of a march from Kent to London to obtain freedom from the current oppression of his day. My grandfather on another side, because of religious beliefs was imprisoned as a pacifist for opposing engagement in the First World War. On the other side, my grandmother fought for 70 years to eliminate New Zealand from its drunkenness as secretary of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Liberty is known as the supreme end to democracy. Something that some of our Bible-believing forebears in England fought for with their blood. Freedom to worship, freedom from oppression is a constant fight for citizens.

Such liberty is fundamental to economic development. Successful wealth formation occurs in contexts of integrity, where trust in contracts, the rule of law, and supportive governmental structures is possible. Capitalism is built on such economic freedom.

Every piece of corruption, of skirting the law, of creating environments of distrust, of creating legalised oppression drag effective economies down, slowing wealth generation and siphoning wealth off from productive ends.

#### Principle of Freedom: Government Transparency

How does one measure freedom in today’s global context? And how does that match the Biblical vision of liberty and *shalom*?

The flip side of the limitations on government is to look at their openness, transparency and to measure the extent of freedom for engagement in democracy. In 2015, New Zealand ranked as number 1 in such a global survey (International Budget Partnership, 2016).

This perhaps is the end result of the debacle when Prime Minister Muldoon was unwilling to open the books to Labour in 1983, between the election results and formal transfer of power. *We decided there and then that no new government would ever face this situation again. There would be more openness…Budget forecasts were changed to make debt needs transparent* (Moore, 1993, pg. 8).

*Shalom* is a concept of overall well-being within a nation or people. While we can measure the economic well-being of a country by its GDP, we need to also evaluate the distribution of that wealth in meeting basic human needs, providing a foundation for well-being and opportunities for its people. Again New Zealand comes out as 5th in the Social Progress index which ranks countries on meeting basic human needs; providing a foundation of well-being; creating opportunity for all through personal rights, freedoms, tolerance and inclusion, access to education. Thus the human development index integrates measures of life expectancy, expected years of schooling, as well as income. New Zealand consistently ranks high on this index, excluding income, New Zealand stands as number 9 (United Nations Development Program, 2016).



Figure 1: Openness of governance. New Zealand tops the global transparency ranking (Graph from the 2015 Open Budget Survey).

In 2016, New Zealand also ranks third in the World in an Index of Economic Freedom, published by the Heritage Foundation. Their index covers the following as measurements of freedom:

Rule of Law

* Property Rights: Degree of a country's legal protection of private property rights, degree of enforcement of those laws, independence of and corruption within the judiciary, and likelihood of expropriation.
* Freedom from Corruption. The non-prevalence of political corruption within a country, according to the Corruption Perceptions Index (New Zealand ranks fourth on this index, by Transparency International).

Limited Government

* Fiscal Freedom:How free is a country from tax burden. It comprises three quantitative measures: top marginal tax rate of both individual (1) and corporate (2) income, and total tax burden as a percentage of GDP (3).
* Government Size/Spending: Governments' expenditures as a percentage of GDP, including consumption and transfers. The higher the percent spending, the lower the score.

Regulatory Efficiency

* Business Freedom: A country's freedom from the burden of regulations on starting, operating, and closing business, given factors such as time, cost and number of procedures, as well as the efficiency of government in the regulatory process.
* Labour Freedom: How free is a country from legal regulation on the labour market, including those relating to minimum wages, hiring and firing, hours of work and severance requirements.
* Monetary Freedom: How free from microeconomic intervention and price instability is a country, basing on an equation considering the weighted average inflation rate in the last three years and price controls.

Open Markets

* Trade Freedom: Freedom from sizeable numbers and burdens of tariffs and non-tariff barriers to imports and exports of a country.
* Investment Freedom: Freedom from restrictions on the movement and use of investment capital, regardless of activity, within and across the country's borders.
* Financial Freedom: A country's independence from government control and interference in the financial sector, including banks. It considers government ownership of financial firms, extent of financial and capital market development, government influence on the allocation of credit and openness to foreign competition.

There is a basis for the above. Historically cities flourish to the degree they possessed economic fluidity and institutional adaptiveness created by economic freedom (Carl J. Schramm, 2008). At the same time it is evident that this has an anti-labor bias and an anti-government intervention bias.

#### Liberty and Governmental Redistribution

Until the early 1800’s in England, the local church was responsible for the poor of its parish. As the feudalism of Christendom increasingly broke down, responsibility began to shift to the Government to care for the poor. This became formalised in the 1930’s with increasing redistribution by the Welfare State.

There are problems moving from spiritual leadership to power politics. This process lead to removal of another limitation to the power of the Government, with concomitant loss of human liberty (hence of economy). We joke that for many New Zealanders, it has meant that the Government becomes the repository of faith, the solver of all problems! Or is it a lament for a lost national soul??

There are problems with governments taking from the rich and giving to the poor. It imperils political liberty, discourages productivity and disassociates the wealth from those with the knowledge of investment and entrepreneurial knowledge which are keys to economic growth.

There are also problems of distributing to the poor. There are always stories of “scammers”, and it would be wrong to glorify the poor as noble or competent as there are many lazy and indolent, and many who are poor because of inability to manage. The distribution system also tends to promote a view of the producers of wealth as the enemy, indeed a violent diabolizing of Capitalism.

It can leave the working poor with little motivation, as often if they attempt part-time work they earn little more than the dole. In that sense it can enfeeble the poor in their struggles to exit poverty, so the rich tell us, though I have yet to see research that verifies this except in isolated anecdotes.

Our New Zealand Social Welfare is efficient, largely effective and has over the years faced and researched all of these issues, to end up at a point of fine balance in creating a safety net at the bottom of society.

Redistribution by the Church as an alternative would be based on effective diaconal development. In today’s world, deacons are equivalent to social workers, or economic development experts, or budgeting managers. Yet how many churches have highly trained social workers, budgeting managers on their staff to handle these needs? We are unprepared for the future. By default, much of the New Zealand church has left these roles to WINZ (Work and Income). On the other hand, within the denominations there are significant social service networks, such as the Baptist Oasis, the Salvation Army Social Services. These deliver much of the governmentally funded services to the community. Why? Because of a motivation of care within the churches.

It may be, that post-Capitalism, post-welfare state, such church-based delivery will enable the sustenance of much of the nation. In the meantime, we live with the tension of a secular government, interfaced with the faith community that has the commitment and committed manpower to engage in mitigating the social injustices and engage the needs of the lower economic sectors of society.

## Liberty and Liberation Theology

In seeking to apply the principle of liberty to the structures of oppressive states, a pattern of theology emerged in Latin America among Catholic priests. It included a commitment to solidarity with Jesus among the poor, and a solidarity in their struggles against injustice. It was rejected by both evangelicals and the official Catholic church as a baptism of Marxist analysis by the scriptures. Marxist analysis was never particularly good, and particularly as cities have diversified the concept of class struggle while, very appropriate in the slums does not identify the core fissures in most cities which are multivariate. Nevertheless it developed some unique questions and potential answers as it engaged the gospel with oppressive Power structures. First in location: It highlighted the normative Christian role to be walking with those in movements that seek liberation from oppression, not alongside those who are the oppressors. Secondly it highlighted the need for wise social analysis, and comprehension of the Powers and how to confront the powers, a theme that is consistent with Anabaptist beliefs in terms of the analysis of oppression and Calvinist analysis in terms of engaging in social structural roles of leadership. There is little evidence of it fostering liberation for the poor in Latin America. This has more been done by Pentecostal movements at the grassroots, and the engagement of the Presbyterian and mainline churches with the intelligentsia at upper levels.

## Michael Novak

On the other side of the spectrum, Michael Novak influenced many with his reflections on Capitalism and freedom. He died Feb 2017 at the age of 83. Novak was a theologian and thinker who cared deeply about liberty and wrote persuasively about what is necessary to preserve freedom for future generations. In honor of his passing, here are quotes by Novak on freedom and institutions:

[On truth and freedom:](https://books.google.com/books?id=7cJvBQAAQBAJ&pg=PR10&lpg=PR10&dq=%E2%80%9CThe+most+critical+threat+to+our+freedom+is+a+failure+to+appreciate+the+power+of+truth.%E2%80%9D&source=bl&ots=KmnwhmDLav&sig=Gvyq_istHMGoHK59WM66itQjukM&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiPqqm32pfSAhUsD8AKHUypDA4Q6AEILzAE#v=onepage&q=%E2%80%9CThe%20most%20critical%20threat%20to%20our%20freedom%20is%20a%20failure%20to%20appreciate%20the%20power%20of%20truth.%E2%80%9D&f=false) “The most critical threat to our freedom is a failure to appreciate the power of truth.”

[On the future of liberty:](https://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/08/awakening-from-nihilismthe-templeton-prize-address) “During the past hundred years, the question for those who loved liberty was whether, relying on the virtues of our peoples, we could survive powerful assaults from without (as, in the Battle of Britain, this city nobly did). During the next hundred years, the question for those who love liberty is whether we can survive the most insidious and duplicitous attacks from within, from those who undermine the virtues of our people, doing in advance the work of the Father of Lies. “There is no such thing as truth,” they teach even the little ones. ‘Truth is bondage. Believe what seems right to you. There are as many truths as there are individuals. Follow your feelings. Do as you please. Get in touch with yourself. Do what feels comfortable.’ Those who speak in this way prepare the jails of the twenty-first century. They do the work of tyrants.”

[On political institutions:](http://articles.latimes.com/1992-11-01/magazine/tm-1599_1_political-system/2) “Our political institutions work remarkably well. They are designed to clang against each other. The noise is democracy at work.”

[On democracy and the poor:](https://books.google.com/books?id=PlPcFkVo6eIC&dq=inauthor:%22Michael+Novak%22&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj_9a-s2ZfSAhWmD8AKHek0BTY4HhDoAQglMAI) “There is an alternative to terror. It is called, in the political order, democracy. In the economic order, it is called the dynamic enterprise economy. . . It empowers poor people from the bottom up. . . . A dynamic economic sector is the poor’s best hope of escaping the prison of poverty. It is the only system so far known to human beings to take poor people and make them, quite soon, middle class, and some of them even (horrors!) rich.”

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