

RESPONSIBILITIES, RIGHTS, AND **FREEDOMS**

FOR HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENTS

ARPACANADA.ca



SUMMARY

This lesson explains how human rights and freedoms ought to be based on biblical responsibilities rather than human nature or human desires. Students will learn how to recognize God-given responsibilities, how these responsibilities translate into rights, and how governments ought to recognize these responsibilities and rights and give their people the freedom to live in the way God commands.

For more information or to give feedback, contact info@arpacanada.ca

RESPONSIBILITIES, RIGHTS, AND FREEDOMS

OVERVIEW

The entire world seems to talk in the language of rights and freedoms these days.

Left-of-centre individuals claim that each human being is deserving of a wide variety of goods and services and insist that these translate into rights that the state must actively provide. Right-of-centre individuals claim that they have a wide variety of freedoms that the government must respect and never abridge under any conditions.

But are these modern conceptions of rights and freedoms biblical?

Historically, the rights and freedoms that we enjoy in Canada today stemmed from a Christian worldview stretching back from creation to the

cross and to the Reformation. This worldview created the basis of the western world that we enjoy today.

One key thing that the Enlightenment neglected, however, is the Christian idea of responsibilities, duties, and obligations that are intrinsically linked to proper rights and freedoms. Without an understanding of the responsibilities that God requires of each person, rights and freedom become just a list of demands that people make of other people, the government, and other institutions in society.

Christians must be able to understand where their responsibilities, rights, and freedoms come from in order to be a faithful witness to the rest of the world.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

How should Christians understand human rights and freedoms?

Human rights and freedoms are central to modern political discourse, so it is imperative that Christians are prepared to talk about human rights and freedoms from a biblical perspective. This includes appreciating the biblical elements in modern declarations of rights and freedoms, as well as critiquing their unbiblical elements.

EXPLAIN THE BASIS FOR RESPONSIBILITIES, RIGHTS, AND FREEDOMS

Distribute *Handout 1 – What are human rights and freedoms based on?* Have the students underline the words *right, obligation, duty, responsibility, freedom, and liberty*.

EXPLORE HOW THESE IDEAS ARE CONNECTED

Distribute *Handout 2 – Responsibilities, rights, and freedoms in the 10 commandments* to groups of 3-4 students. Have the students read each commandment and try to figure out what responsibilities, rights, and freedoms flow from each commandment. An example is done for them. Encourage the students to look for hints in *Handout 1* and to reference Q&A 94-113 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Discuss answers with the class.

EXPLORE THE CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Display an online version of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms at the front of the classroom. It is available at <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-12.html>. Read and discuss in particular the preamble and sections 1, 2, 7, 15, 27, and 33.

Teachers can use <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/how-rights-protected/guide-canadian-charter-rights-freedoms.html> to help explain these sections.

Display an online version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is available at <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>. Read and discuss in particular Articles 1-3, 7, 16-20, and 26

Discuss both the Charter and the Declaration with the students.

- Are these rights related to biblical responsibilities? Or do they seem made up to protect what some people might want?

EVALUATE THE CANADIAN CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Inform the students that many of these rights and freedoms have been abused:

- Canada's law against shopping on Sunday was struck down because the court thought it violated the "freedom of religion and conscience" (Charter Section 2a)
- Canada's laws on abortion, euthanasia, and prostitution were struck down because the court thought they violated the right to "life, liberty and security of the person" (Charter Section 7)
- Gay marriage has been defended under the right "to equality under the law" (Charter Section 15)

Discuss how Canada's system of rights and freedoms could be improved.

ENGAGE WITH THE WORLD

Contact your provincial ARPA manager (Levi Minderhoud in BC, Ed Hoogerdyk in Alberta, Ryan Mans in Ontario, and Colin Postma in the rest of the country) and ask if your school can borrow a *Freedom Banner* display. This display consists of a number of banners emblazoned with the fundamental freedoms listed in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and a set of rack cards. The display is designed to be set up in a public area like a park so that volunteers can engage passersby about the importance of having the freedom to do as we ought (not necessarily the freedom to do what we want). For more information, visit <https://arpacanada.ca/freedom-banner-display/>.

WHAT ARE HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS BASED ON?

Excerpt from Cornelius van Dam's "God and Government" (page 79)

God and his rights came first in the thinking of the Reformers. God has the right to be obeyed by mankind whom he had created to honor him and to give him glory. Humanity's obligation to obey God includes heeding the divine demand to love one's neighbor. Only when one's duty to God and the neighbor is understood can one speak of human rights. They are grounded in the duties and responsibilities we owe to God and our neighbor, as defined in God's law. It is normative.

More specifically, therefore, loving God means obeying the first four of the Ten Commandments – to worship God alone and to do so according to his will, to honor his name, and to maintain his day of rest. The love for the neighbor means obeying the last six commandments – to honor father and mother and all authority, not to murder, not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to bear false witness, and not to covet. All these duties demanded by God translates into rights. After all, if God commands, who is able to deny one the duty of obedience? It is such a person's right. So, if one wants to love God according to his will, then no one has the jurisdiction to take away one's right to honor God. That right, therefore, includes the right to worship God alone, the right to be free from the bondage of false gods and false oaths, and the right to enjoy rest and worship on the day of rest. Because God commands it, he has a right to this obedience.

Similarly, if one wishes to love one's neighbor in accordance with the divine demand, no one can take that right away. Indeed, one's God-given duty to the neighbor means that the neighbor has the right to see the results of that duty. One person's duties not to kill, to commit adultery, to steal, or to bear false witness thus gives rise to another person's rights to life, property, fidelity, and reputation.

The Reformation also pointed out that every person is made in God's image (Gen 1:27; 9:6). This fact has several implications and consequences. It sets human beings and human life apart from all creation. Humanity has a special place in the world and cannot, for example, be placed on the same level as animal or plant life. God's law therefore protects human life and its relationships and sets the norms for human behavior. Furthermore, being made in God's image means that one must have the freedom to obey God and do his will. Another consequence of being made in God's image is that all people are equal before God and before their neighbor. All must therefore have an equal standing before the state and the state must treat all equally. The practical result must be that the rights of everyone are equally protected and promoted. One important reason for this is so that all can perform the responsibilities that their rights assume, namely to love God and their neighbor according to the divine norms. This duty calls for laws that curb and restrain sin for according to Scripture all are inclined to evil (e.g. Rom 3:10-12).

RESPONSIBILITIES, RIGHTS, AND FREEDOMS IN THE 10 COMMANDMENTS

Command	Responsibility What does this command mean that you must do?	Right What right does this responsibility create?	Freedom What freedoms should the government give so that you can fulfill this responsibility?
I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.	I have the responsibility to worship God alone	I have the right to worship God alone	The government should give me the freedom of religion
You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them.			
You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain			

Command	Responsibility What does this command mean that you must do?	Right What right does this responsibility create?	Freedom What freedoms should the government give so that you can fulfill this responsibility?
Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.			
Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.			
You shall not murder.			
You shall not commit adultery.			

Command	Responsibility What does this command mean that you must do?	Right What right does this responsibility create?	Freedom What freedoms should the government give so that you can fulfill this responsibility?
You shall not steal.			
You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.			
You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.			