

Embracing responsibility

What Does This Mean?

Behavior sometimes is blamed on our genes or our environment, and this can lead to an implicit or explicit assumption that it's not our fault. Without denying the influence of genetics or environment, Christianity maintains that we are responsible for the decisions we make, though in some situations our choice and responsibility are reduced. Christians believe that the gift of freedom to choose was given at creation but weakened by sin, so that it is now harder to make good choices. One of the early church fathers, Augustine, likened it to a scale, with the pan labeled "Bad Decisions" already loaded. The scale still works, but it is biased. This bias can be corrected by God's grace — his love and help. Throughout the Bible people are called to make right choices with God's help (Joshua 24:15; Matthew 7:13: "Enter through the narrow gate," Jesus urged, "for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it").

Ultimately, people are called to account before God, which assumes a degree of responsibility for making choices (Romans 14:12). If people had no capacity for making choices, they would not be responsible.

Man must cease attributing his problems to his environment, and learn again to exercise his will—his personal responsibility in the realm of faith and morals. Albert Schweitzer

God never forces men to act against their wills. By workings of outward providence or of inward grace, the Lord may change men's minds, but He will not coerce a human being into thoughts, words, or actions. Walter J. Chantry

What Does This Mean in School?

In school, teaching and learning can be organized in a way that gives students responsibility and allows them to make choices within the planned framework set by the teacher.

- We can give responsibility to students and hold them accountable for the choices they make. We can give students responsible choices to make in their learning.
- In a variety of subjects, students can explore how free or determined characters' choices were and what alternatives could have been chosen. Examples of both more- and less-free choices can be used.
- Freedom, determinism, and the influences on behavior can be explored in both science and literature.

Have you experienced people denying responsibility and blaming it on circumstances or the way they are made? Could they have made different choices? Identify a lesson where you could highlight issues of choice and responsibility—for example, in history or English.



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