

Student Work

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"You Gotta Serve Somebody"

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“You Gotta Serve Somebody”

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May 5,
2017

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Daily Scripture Texts

Psalm 23

Exodus 3:16-22, 4:18-20

1 Peter 2:13-17

Recently, I've been enjoying listening to gospel music. One of my favorite songs I've heard lately is Bob Dylan's "Gotta Serve Somebody," sang in the soulful timbre of [Shirley Caesar](#). In the song, Shirley tells us, "you might be an ambassador to England or France, you might like to gamble, you might like to dance, you might be the heavyweight champion of the world, you might be a socialite with a long string of pearls, [but] you're gonna have to serve somebody." The whole song is an acknowledgment of the reality of the human condition: we are all servants to something.

In the sixteenth verse of 1 Peter 2, Peter tells us that we are to "Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God." At first glance, it seems that Peter is giving us conflicting messages. He tells us that we are to live as people who are free but also to live as servants of God. So which is it? Are we to live a life of freedom or a life of servitude?

The truth is, it's both. The reason this verse seems so contradictory is because of the American culture in which many of us were raised. We live in the "land of the free," where "freedom rings." We call our home "the sweet land of liberty," in which the Rolling Stones and Pitbull tell us "I'm free to do what I want." We need our free time so we can "catch up" on our favorite Netflix show (an ironic obligation), we need our vacation time to be free from the job that we worked so hard for, we need to retire as early as financially possible to be free to do fun things while our bodies still allow us to. Here in America, freedom is part of the very fabric of society.

Recently, my friend Kyle Fossé wrote a musical (*A Prison Called Freedom*) that was performed on Dordt College's campus. The show asks some hard questions about this idea of freedom that manifests itself worldwide—especially questions about how the American sense of freedom might actually be somewhat limiting to those who subscribe to it. A few characters in the show claim, "Freedom isn't freedom 'til you're free from all the rules."

This line got me thinking, is the American idea of freedom the same as the Biblical idea of freedom? Is being "free from all the rules" really what Christians are called to? Peter tells us it's not.

It's essential to understand that freedom is never just freedom *from* something; it is also freedom *to* something. Never are we content to be free from our jobs to just stare at the wall—we are free *to* do something else, usually something relaxing that we want to do. And this "*freedom to*" part of freedom is always dictated by something. For most of American society, it's dictated by selfish desires, the desires of a self that is fallen. But as Christians, we are called to a unique freedom.

As Christians, are free *from* sin and free *to* Christ. True freedom is not being "free to do what I want," but being free to serve God. Paul tells us in Romans 6 that we, "having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness." Not only are we free from the condemning power of sin, we are free *to* the service of God and to righteous living. And this freedom is infinitely more satisfying than what the world has to offer. Some of the most "free" people in the world seem to be the unhappiest. How many divorces has Hollywood seen? How many instances of corruption have plagued Fortune 500 companies? Clearly, the freedom the world offers leads nowhere.

The freedom of Christ, however, is rooted in the work accomplished by Christ on the cross, that is, freeing us from

the shackles of our sin forever. And now we are not only free from our sin, we are free *to* Christ and all the benefits that result from being an adopted child of God. This freedom allows us to live lives in accordance with God's law out of gratitude for Christ's sacrifice, which is truly the greatest freedom we could ever experience. This freedom calls us to regular church attendance, to helping our neighbor jumpstart his car, to sharing the gospel with the homeless, to going out of our way to help the new hire at work—all for the name of Christ. Being shackled to the law of God is the most free we could ever be. To live a life devoted to serving the one who gave his life for you—what greater freedom could we possibly imagine?

Ultimately, Bob Dylan and Shirley Caesar are right when they sing, "It might be the devil, it might the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody." Freedom by the definition of the world can never satisfy, but freedom in Christ satisfies eternally.