The inference, of course, is this: all of us must make choices. It is what we teach our clients during treatment. Treatment is all about teaching our clients to make healthy choices. We don’t somehow magically infuse health and wellness into their fragile psyches. Instead, we lay upon them an urgent need: they must make serious life changing choices if they want the long and healthful life that is waiting for them.

The choice. It’s an old story. Cain faced it before he murdered Abel. He heard the Voice, “Sin lies couched at the door, Cain, but you are able if you so choose, to overcome the murderous impulse of your heart.” Ancient Israel faced it: would they stay put or risk a dangerous Red Sea crossing and chance the exciting possibility of living in a land “flowing with milk and honey?” Adolescents who months ago outlived the hospitality of long-suffering parents must make the choice to live with house rules or risk the responsibility of choosing to live in their own space.

This is not a choice of freedom versus slavery. It is a choice about whom or what we will serve. It is a choice about whom or what owns us. Freedom is a myth or merely relative freedom at best. Who could disagree with Kentucky farmer, poet and sage, Wendell Berry? He speaks of only the shadowy inchoate possibility of freedom: “Our present idea of freedom is only the freedom to do as we please: to sell ourselves for a high salary and a home in the suburbs.” This is not freedom. Mammon is the owner and slave holder. Dylan is right: we gotta serve somebody. Someday owns us. Who or what will it be?

An addict in recovery comes to terms with knowing something about ownership when he admits powerlessness over drugs and alcohol. The drug of choice was master of the house and keeper of the inn. During initial stages of recovery, he acknowledges what he worships, before whom he does obeisance, and on whose behalf he makes sacrificial offerings.

You gotta serve somebody. And this: “You gotta make a choice about whom to serve.”

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Who then? Again, addicts in recovery make a decision to surrender their lives and will to the God of their understanding. It is not a matter of no longer being a slave/servant to another. It is only an issue of who the new owner is. St. Paul understood this when he acknowledged he was no longer a slave to the law but a slave to Christ. Freedom for a recovering addict means surrendering life and will to the God of his understanding.

Young adolescent clients love to flaunt their freshly minted atheism. Fifteen years young and already they have determined there is no god. After listening patiently to their squeaky rant, I often suggest to them that they have been chasing after and faithfully serving their drug of choice. It owns them. Quite a taskmaster too, I might add. “How’s that working out for you?”

Wendell Berry speaks of another so-called freedom. It is really an obligation born out of an allegiance to God: it is the freedom to take care of ourselves and also one another. Recovering addicts in the program of AA say as much when after acknowledging a spiritual awakening to the reality and presence of God—the real deal, they experience a similar desire to carry the message of recovery to others and practice the principles of recovery in all their affairs.

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