

## **Atlantic Baptist Article Faith in the Public Square**

By Lois Mitchell

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### **When Will We “Come to our Senses”?**

The parable of the Prodigal son has provided the text for many a sermon – some focus on the prodigal himself, others on the love of the father and still others on the eldest son. There are profound lessons for us in the lives of each of the characters in the narrative. But there’s a little phrase in the midst of the parable which has always intrigued me. The son, as you will recall, has asked the father for his inheritance and upon receiving it, has left home and gone off to a distant land where he has wasted his inheritance on riotous living. Then, destitute, he finds himself feeding pigs. At this point in the narrative, the text says: “When he came to his senses...” (Luke 15:17).

There are actually three references in the New Testament to this concept of coming to one’s senses. The second is in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 15:34) and the third is in Paul’s second letter to Timothy (2:26).

For the prodigal son, coming to his senses produces a stunning clarity as he sees himself and his selfish actions for what they are. It’s as though he has been living in a state of disorientation, but now his eyes are opened and he can see clearly. He repents of his actions and attitudes and resolves to go back to his father, confessing that “I have sinned against heaven and against you.”

For me, this is a compelling picture of the trap that Satan lays for each one of us. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. He lies constantly. He deceives. He manipulates. He distorts. He keeps us off balance by casting shadows. We need to ask ourselves constantly, “are we being deceived?”. God calls us to love Him with all of our hearts, mind, soul and strength. These are the battlefields where Satan will mount his attacks. How are our defenses? Do we understand the armor that God has provided for us and are we using it effectively? Are we being deceived? Is our thinking disoriented?

As we strive to truly “be the church” right here in Canada in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these are crucial questions. Satan will try to deceive us by appealing to our selfish nature - the sin nature - which is the natural condition of our heart, and by confusing our doctrinal understanding (our mind). We live in a pleasure-seeking, senses titillating, morally corrosive fantasy land. It is certainly easy to become disoriented in such an environment.

And yet, there is a great danger in the other direction too. If the pendulum swings too far in the other direction, we can believe (falsely!) that the only security lies in strict adherence to rules and regulations and a rigid separation from the world and its temptations (sound familiar?). Living according to this

standard (after all, God calls us to be holy!) can render us ineffective in real Kingdom living. How can we be salt and light if we are living in fear of sin?

But let's look at the other two passages that speak of "coming to our senses". The Corinthians passage (1 Cor. 15:33-34) says: "Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.' **Come back to your senses** as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God--I say this to your shame." We don't have time here to get into a detailed exegesis, but suffice to say that Paul is calling the church in Corinth to repentance and to a correct understanding of the doctrine of the resurrection. To "come back to their senses" in this case, means that they will stop the sin of proclaiming false doctrine.

The third passage literally leaped off the page for me recently as I was struggling before God to discern His leading and will in our response to the potential redefinition of marriage. The letters to Timothy are passionate and personal, full of wisdom and encouragement for Timothy as Paul prepares him for leadership. As Paul writes from a Roman prison cell, there is a poignant sense of urgency in this letter as his concern for his protégé and for the church burn through in every verse. In 2 Timothy 2:22-26 we read:

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will **come to their senses** and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Here it is again! Paul has identified the profound need for those who are to be used of God to "come to their senses", but he goes even further – as we come to our senses, we "escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them [us!] captive to do his will." The stakes are huge in this battle between good and evil. The call to the Christian life is not for the faint of heart! But notice again the connection between "coming to our senses" and repentance. Paul says that repentance is a prerequisite for a knowledge of the truth.

In all three references the connection between repentance and coming to our senses is strong and unmistakable. The lesson is this: we cannot see God's will and way clearly until we confess and repent of our sin, and this is an ongoing discipline.

God calls us to a life of sacrifice and service and He provides all of the wisdom and strength that we need. May we continually seek Him with a pure heart, repenting daily, not only of our generic tendency to sin, but of our actual specific

sins. Then and only then will we come to our senses and be used of God to extend the reign and rule of His kingdom on earth as it is in heaven.