

# THE NATHAN PRINCIPLE

*How to convict the sincerely deceived of Religious Error*

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## INTRODUCTION

- A. Nathan approached David in a very unique way in 2 Samuel 12:17.
  1. We can learn from Nathan and receive **great insight** how to convict people of error if we will study the account carefully.
  2. Notice: **David is objective**. His mind is clear because he's not thinking about *himself* or *his* situation.
    - a. David understands well the principle of injustice that is involved "*and David's anger was kindled greatly.*" "*As Jehovah liveth, the man that hath done this thing is **worthy to die**.*" He showed no mercy upon.." "*This man that has done this thing and showed no pity*" (vs. 5)!
    - b. Nathan then approached David, still filled with righteous indignation. I picture him walking up the steps to his throne, sticking his finger in his face, and telling David - "*Thou art the man*" (vs. 7). No doubt a hush fell over the crowd at this decisive moment. For David, it must have been like being hit with a ton of bricks.
  3. Suddenly he is **hit with the realization** that he had just pronounced his *own* death sentence!
    - a. He was guilty of the **same thing** in principle.
    - b. David agreed to the **principle** - Nathan simply made the **application**.
  4. Now it becomes simply a question of honesty. Is David to be **consistent** and **admit his error** or **be stubborn** and refuse to see it?
    - a. Being a "*man after God's own heart*" he sincerely confessed.
    - b. A very simple and short confession, "*I have sinned*" (vs 13).
- B. The idea is to get the person to **listen** and make an **objective decision** about some vital principle of truth **before** he\she is emotionally involved.
  1. Our pride and egos often get in our *own way* and cloud our reasoning.
  2. We need to stop using our Bibles as some sort of PANIC BUTTON, to rush to for answers when in a panic. It would be much better if we would study out key issues first, when we can be objective about the study, and then have the courage to **act upon our pre-studied convictions when the inevitable crisis does come!**
- C. The Nathan Principle has **revolutionized** my personal teaching.
  1. Once the **foundation principles** are affirmed, **the application** is made to the point of error (usually at a later time, as issues arise).

2. When the application is made, the prospect has already **admitted** the principle, so now it's just a **question of being consistent**.
- D. Throughout your personal work studies, get the person to **objectively accept** certain **key principles first**, then at a **later time** simply **refer back**. It may be weeks later, or as in the case of Nathan and David, it may be in the same setting.
1. Don't start by arguing! Get the appointment to study.
  2. Most start off with the conclusion - "*Instrumental music is wrong -- this is why.*" Barriers are already up!
  3. It is usually better to start with the **principle first** which they can **clearly see** and then at the appropriate time make the **application**, and say in essence -- "*Thou art the man.*"
    - a. You saw it back here, remember, can't you see the same principle applies here?
    - b. Usually, you wait much later in the study to show them the parallel when you come to the point of controversy.
- E. The unique thing about this lesson is not the **material** itself, but the **method of approach**. We are not so much teaching the "*sword of the spirit*" as to "*how to wield it.*"
- F. What's the best way to establish these principles? The way Jesus did with parables (analogies, illustrations, etc.) They serve as "*windows to let light in*" so people can see Divine truth clearly.
- I. **EXAMPLES OF HOW "THE NATHAN PRINCIPLE" MAY BE USED.** (Note: The first three are to be used before any study, regardless of what first principle study you are using. I suggest you put a few brief reminders in the back of your Bible to remind you, until it becomes second nature to you. The rest of the Nathan Principles are best "*plugged in*" when you are presenting a multi-lesson approach which includes a survey of the Old Testament, and you simply cover them as you go.)
- A. Before each study draw a line and then ask, "*How long is this line?*"
    - a. Note that they all will make **sincere** guesses.
      1. One guess is as good as another.
      2. Your opinion is just as good as mine; one belief is just as good as another.
    - b. Now -- measure it with a ruler.
      1. There is only **one** right answer. All the guesses, though sincere, that don't match up to the ruled line are wrong.
      2. Is that being narrow or too closed minded?
      3. What if, even after it's pointed out what the ruler says, someone still refuses to admit they have been mistaken?
      4. That's right, you show yourself to be either ignorant,(of the fact that a ruler is the universally accepted standard of measurement), or stubborn,(refusing to admit you have been wrong), or both!
    - c. The Bible is our Rule and when we find a Bible answer to a Bible question, we must be willing to accept it no matter how sincere we were in our previous beliefs. Remember, this is a **Bible study**, we are interested in what **the Bible says**, not what our opinions or what traditions of men teach.

1. God gave the Israelites ten **commandments**, not ten **suggestions** (or vague guidelines).
  2. Religion is more than just wishful thinking or imagination, it is based on **Authority** (Colossians 3:17). When someone says, "*Open up in the name of the law.*" he means by the **authority** of the law!
    - 1). Baseball without rules would be a riot.
    - 2). A nation without rules would be anarchy.
    - 3). An Army without regulations would become a mob.
    - 4). Religion without authority becomes chaos and filled with division.
  3. Let's agree **never** to say, "*I think so,*" "*I was always taught,*" "*My church teaches,*" but instead only be interested in what the Bible says.
    - 1). Make sure as the teacher, you are careful not to violate this principle yourself.
    - 2). If you say, "*The church of Christ teaches,*" then you leave the door open for them to say, "*Well my church teaches.*" At that point there is very little you can say, because you have by your speech established the wrong standard of authority.
      - a). The church does not disseminate its own doctrine. It is simply instructed to "*Sound out the word of the Lord*" (I Thessalonians 1:8).
      - b). When Jesus walked among the lampstands in the book of Revelation, it clearly demonstrates this principle. The churches were simply holding up the truth and proclaiming it. They were not candlesticks producing something as their own.
  4. **IT IS IMPORTANT** to say "*Paul says,*" "*Jesus teaches,*" "*Peter wrote,*" etc. **rather than** "*I think*" or "*the church of Christ teaches,*" etc.,.
  5. Later in the study you might have to go back and remind them of this principle. Truth is exclusive, and once it's pointed out to you, if you refuse to obey, you become dishonest (etc.)
    - 1). The truth of God saves us, **not** the opinions of men.
    - 2). Illust: Sprinkling in contrast to immersion as the proper mode of baptism.
- B. ESTABLISH THAT WE ARE ONLY INTERESTED IN TRUTH BECAUSE ONLY IT CAN SET US FREE (John 8:32).
1. The Devil is the deceiver. He is good at his job. He does not want us to come to an understanding of truth. With this in mind, at the start of our study, it is important to recognize **three things that have nothing to do with truth**.
    - a. The number of people that believe a thing (50,000 people can say something foolish and it is still foolish).
    - b. The amount of time it has been believed.
    - c. The degree of sincerity of the believer.
  2. Using the illustration of the world being flat and applying it to the above three points helps to clarify the issue. Does the fact that because years ago **most everyone** believed the world was flat, and the fact that this had been **sincerely** believed for **thousands of years**, change the facts? Did this make a round world flat? Of course not.

C. THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF DENOMINATIONALISM CAN BE OBJECTIVELY EXPLAINED FROM ECCLESIASTES 5:1. (This is a concept difficult for many to grasp. In order to begin to carve a new "*cognitive niche*" in the person's mind, it is important to lay the foundation at the beginning. This is designed to help teach that we are not **interdenominational**, but **undenominational**).

1. What's the difference between the Baptists, the Methodists, the Catholics, etc., and those of us that claim to be **un**-denominational?
  - a. We all agree on the fact that there is a God.
  - b. We disagree on **how we come to terms** with God.
    1. They say, "*I believe in God, so now I want to find out what I am going to do with Him.*"
      - a). Go to the church of your choice.
      - b). Come to terms with God on **my** terms.
    2. But we say, "*I believe in God, so now I need to find out what **He** wants to do with **me.**"*
      - a). Go to the church of **His** choice.
      - b). Come to terms with God on His terms, not mine.
2. "*To draw nigh to hear (listen) is better than to give the sacrifice of a fool not knowing you are doing evil*" (Ecclesiastes 5:1)
  - a. We must humble ourselves and admit that we don't have all the answers --"*listen!*"
  - b. Many religious people make impressive sacrifices, but they are "*foolish*" if they are not following God's will.
  - c. If one is going to bother to be religious, for God's sake, you might as well make sure you **practice a religion that will get you to heaven!** The only way to make sure of this, is to come to terms with God on His terms and make sure you are doing it God's way!
  - d. This is what is involved in the **undenominational** plea. Not to unite on **compromise, but GOD'S ETERNAL TRUTH!**

D. **USE THE OLD TESTAMENT TO ESTABLISH KEY PRINCIPLES AND THEN USE THEM LATER TO ESTABLISH IMPORTANT POINTS IN THE NEW (Galatians 3:24)**

1. **Noah (along with the Patriarchs) was saved by three ingredients.**
  - a. Grace (Genesis 6:8) (Noah "*found favor*"---=grace)
  - b. Faith (Hebrews 11:7)
  - c. Obedience (Genesis 6:22)
  - d. We, of course, are saved by these things too, though under a different covenant. They are **not mutually exclusive**.
2. **The Law of Exclusion is demonstrated with Noah and the Ark. God commanded gopher wood. Would Noah have obeyed God if he had used Pine, Oak, or Birch? NO!**

- a. God commanded 300 cubits. Would he have obeyed God if he made it 301 cubits? **NO!**
  - 1). Here -- Noah was doing what God said, plus he was **adding**, doing something additional to what God said.
  - 2). People often argue "*they are singing, using vocal music, but just doing even more with instrumental music.*"

**3. The illustration of Jacob and Joseph helps to deal with Emotionalism.**

- a. In Genesis 37:32-35 Jacob hears a lie (is deceived) and believes it! He has a tremendous emotional response as a result.
- b. In Genesis 45:26, Jacob hears the truth but refuses to believe it because of his previous belief. There is **no** emotional response.
- c. Conclusion: Our emotional response to a message has **nothing** to do with whether the message we heard was true or false!
- d. Later if your prospect proclaims, "*Yes, I **know** I'm saved because I feel it in my bones,*" simply remind him that Jacob **thought he knew for sure** that Joseph was dead too!
  - 1. However, when he saw the **evidence** (the wagons from Egypt, Genesis 45:27) he lined up his **feelings** with the facts.
  - 2. **I don't doubt you had an emotional experience**; the question is, does that emotional experience prove you were right? (This is **an important point**. Don't tell someone they did not have an emotional experience. They ought to know! Telling them they did not is like telling them that "*water isn't wet.*")

**4. Teach the necessity of baptism from the Old Testament using Exodus 14:13; and I Corinthians 10:2.**

- a. Point out that Moses told them to "*wait for the salvation of Jehovah*"(v. 13) and then after they passed through the Red Sea and Pharaoh's army was destroyed then we learn "*Thus Jehovah saved Israel that day*"(v.30)
  - 1. Were they saved **before** or **after** their coming out of the Red Sea?
  - 2. Obviously after.
- b. Paul in I Corinthians 10:2 compares their baptism of the sea and the cloud to our baptism today.
- c. Notice also it was "*a great work*" but Jehovah's work (v. 31). Same thing with our baptism (Colossians 2:12)
- d. Requiring obedience as one of several conditions of our salvation, doesn't cause us to **merit** our salvation, nor does it discredit grace in any way.

**5. Show the proper understanding of New Testament church government including local autonomy and an undenominational structure by explaining about the original governmental system under the judges.**

- a. The period of the judges was characterized by Tribal Independence.

- b. The only **bond** that held them together was the fact that they belonged to the **same family** (all children of Israel) and followed the **same covenant** (the law of Moses).
- c. **God Alone** was to be their **king**.
- d. Now notice **Isaiah 1:26**, prophecy concerning the coming kingdom and establishment of the church. "*I will restore thy judges as at the first and thy counselors as at the beginning.*" **What is there about the judges that will become a part of the New Testament church?**
  - 1. Is it possible that this is a reference to God's ultimate plan for congregational independence or autonomy?
  - 2. The only bond that will hold brethren together is the fact that they belong to the **same family** (all children of God and brethren in Christ) and follow the **same covenant** (the New Testament).
  - 3. Now, Christ alone is our King.
- e. By explaining the governmental system under the judges (which no one is defensive about) and **getting them to understand that** --the task of explaining the organizational structure of the church later on is much easier!

#### 6. Lessons about Grace and Faith from Jericho (Joshua 6).

- a. Notice the city was a "*gift from Jehovah*" ( 2:16), yet required obedience in order to receive the "*gift*".
  - 1. Baptists claim if salvation is a free gift there is nothing you can do to receive it-- Not so!
    - a). Though Jericho was "*a gift*", God did **put conditions on how to receive it**. It did not make it any less of a gift.
    - b). If I give you a check for \$1,000,000 that doesn't mean you merit the gift or decrease the value of it, simply because I tell you that you have to drive to a certain bank across town to cash it!
  - 2. Baptists claim also that once He gives us a free gift, He won't take it away because that makes God an "*Indian Giver*"--Not so! They later lost Jericho and the whole Promised Land because of disobedience.
- b. It took a lot of Faith for them to march around the walls (Hebrews 11:30)
  - a. Yet God did not bless Faith until it was manifested in complete obedience.(Walls did not get a little weaker each time they marched around them. Nothing happened until they completely obeyed all that God asked them to do).
  - b. Partial obedience is not acceptable! (Applications numerous.)
- c. No **logical connection** between the **action required** and the **promise** received.
  - a. What did marching around walls have to do with taking a city?
  - b. These were steps of faith. They brought the promised result.

c. Illustration Baptism. Don't try to explain why it **makes sense to be baptized from a human perspective**. The point is, God said it! We must obey and believe it as a test of our faith in HIM!

**7. Samuel's wicked sons were used as an excuse to violate God's law (I Sam 8).**

- a. The people used one wrong as an excuse to do another wrong!
  - 1). Two wrongs never make a right, but one wrong is often used as an excuse to do more wrong.
  - 2). This is **very** prevalent in people's thinking today. Example:
    - a. *"There are hypocrites in the church, therefore, I'm not a member."*
    - b. *"People don't take care of orphans individually, so church supported institutions must do it."*
    - c. *"People don't give enough to support the church, so we need to get into business and raise money other ways."* (etc.)
  - 3). Many of these arguments are nothing more than *"the ends justify the means"*.

**8. King Saul gave a religious reason for disobeying God (I Samuel 15:20-22).**

- a. King Saul rationalized that since his lack of obedience was in order to *"offer sacrifice"* that he was justified.
- b. Samuel rebuked Saul telling him *"to obey is **better** than to sacrifice"* (I Samuel 15:22)
- c. This is **very** prevalent today also.
  - 1). *"The Missionary Society is okay because it's converting lots of people."*
  - 2). *"The organ in worship is acceptable because it's pretty and very edifying."* (etc.)

**Conclusion:**

- A. Many other examples could be given but this should suffice.
- B. In your teaching look for key principles like this and establish them first, then subsequently teaching is much easier.
- C. Remember--in matters of religion keep the discussion as objective as possible.
  - 1. The devil dislikes this because it makes it more difficult for him to deceive people and cloud their thinking with pride and emotion.
  - 2. Use the *"Nathan Principle"* and effectively overcome one of the greatest barriers in personal teaching!