

“People of Principle”  
Acts 12:1-4  
(Preached at Trinity, March 1, 2006)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. As we enter into **Chapter 12** we are immediately introduced to King Herod. The name Herod is familiar but it is a name shared by many in this family. Let me give you a brief rundown of the Herods of Scripture:
  - Herod the Great – reigned from 41 B.C. to 1 B.C. He was the Herod of Matthew 2 who met with the wise men and who sought to kill Jesus as a child. He was married 10 times and was the head of the Herod family.
  - Herod Philip the First – He was the first husband of Herodias who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. He is mentioned by the name of Philip in **Matthew 14:3**. He held no official office.
  - Herod Antipas – the second husband of Herodias. He consented to the death of John the Baptist. He was also the Herod to whom Pilate sent Jesus for trial.
  - Herod Philip the Second – He was the founder of Caesarea Philippi which was named after him. He was also called Philip in the Luke 3:1.
  - Herod the Great had another son, Aristobulus whom he murdered. Aristobulus, however, had a son, Herod Agrippa who is the Herod in our present passage in **Acts 12**.
    - We might also note that Herod Agrippa was the father of Agrippa the Second who examined Paul in **Acts 25 & 26**
    - He was also the father of Drusilla who was the wife of Felix before whom Paul was tried in **Acts 24**
2. Herod Agrippa had been educated in Rome but was careful to behave in a manner that would maintain his popularity with the Jews. He carefully observed the Jewish law and observances. In order to achieve further popularity with the Jews he decided to viciously attack the Christian Church.
3. The sad truth is that Herod wasn’t a man of principle. He was an opportunist. He persecuted God’s people not because they violated his principles but because it would gain him popularity.

**Verse 3** – “because he saw it pleased the Jews”

  - A. And so he killed the Apostle James – the first Apostle to become a martyr.
  - B. Then he arrested Peter with the intention of killing him. The problem was it was the Passover and during the week of unleavened bread no trial or execution could be carried out. Herod postponed Peter’s execution as another gesture to assure his popularity with the Jews.
4. People lacking principle have done some of the worst things in history. It was for a lack of principle that Pilate delivered Jesus to be crucified.
5. We live in a day where few people seem to be people of principle, people of conviction, people of integrity, people who will stand upon their beliefs. It is all around us:

- A. In the Senate vote for the confirmation of Justice Samuel Alito the vote went strictly among party lines. Only one Republican voted against him and only three Democrats voted for him. Did they vote their conscience or did they vote to please their party?
- B. Terry Schiavo was starved to death. Was it a matter of principle or convenience?
6. Unfortunately, even people professing Christ are motivated more by pragmatism than principle.  
Robert Bork - *Slouching Towards Gomorrah* (1996) - "While most people claim to be religious, most are also not comfortable with those whose faith is strong enough to effect their public behavior. Americans are the most religious people among the industrial democracies; 90 percent of Americans say they believe in God, over half report they pray at least once a day, and more than 49 percent claim to have gone to church in any given week. The truth is that, despite the statistics on churchgoing, etc., the United States is a very secular nation that, for the most part does not take religion seriously. It is increasingly clear that very few people who claim religion could truthfully say that it informs their attitudes and significantly affects their behavior."
7. People of integrity are now often excluded from public life. We no longer want people of principle to be our leaders.  
 Speaking of the confirmation of John Ashcroft as Attorney General, Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State said, "Because Ashcroft allows his religion to influence his political judgments, he should not be confirmed as the attorney general of the United States."
8. Relativism is ruling our generation. No one is willing to stand upon anything because they don't believe in absolute truth.
9. Throughout history Christians have suffered greatly because they stood on principle; upon truth. They were not willing to sacrifice their integrity.  
 John Bunyan – "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience."  
 Martin Luther – "Here I stand; I can do none other, so help me God."
10. Herod will forever stand as an example of a man lacking integrity. He was not a man of principle. Instead, he was willing to do anything to please the crowd – even commit murder.  
 Are you a person of principle? Are you a person of integrity? Are you willing to stand upon truth even at great personal expense?
- I. As Christians we need more than ever to affirm the principle of Sola Scriptura
- A. Sola Scriptura was one of the five slogans of the Protestant Reformation
1. Scripture is the only infallible rule for deciding issues of faith and practice
  2. Scripture is our sole authority.  
 All Scripture is "God breathed" and there is no higher authority.
  3. Sola Scriptura does not mean that the Bible contains all knowledge.  
 Our lives, however, must never contradict the teachings of Scripture.  
**Psalm 119:4** – "Thou hast commanded *us* to keep thy precepts diligently."
- B. There have always been those who have sought to replace the Bible's authority with their own
1. This is the chief problem with our nation today  
 People are seeking to put their authority supreme over the Bible
    - a. This is why we kill babies before they are born

- b. This is why homosexuality is an accepted lifestyle
- c. This is why we are living in a land with increasing lawlessness
- 2. The problem is they have no code of conduct
  - a. People today are governed by their own ideas – their ideas are governed by pragmatism – whatever works
  - b. This was Herod’s problem – he was governed not by principle but by the nodding approval of the people.
- 3. As God’s people we are to obey His Word in spite of what others might think or do  
**Psalm 119:51** – “The proud have had me greatly in derision: yet have I not declined from thy law.”

II. It isn't enough just to be dogmatic. We need to make sure our principles are Bible centered

- A. There have always been people who are dogmatic
  - 1. The terrorists of 911 were dogmatic – they were willing to lay down their lives for what they believed
  - 2. There may be sincere well intentioned people, yet without God's Word it is nothing
  - 3. Principles not shaped by God’s Word are nothing more than vain prejudices. It is being dogmatic on ignorance.  
**Matthew 15:14** – “. . . and if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch.”
- B. God demands that we stand firm upon truth, absolute truth, biblical truth
  - 1. God's principles come as a package – we trust God's Word, all of His Word
  - 2. But we need to make sure our strong principles are not actually just personal prejudices or dogmatism
    - a. For example condemning others for wearing makeup
    - b. There are hundreds of rules that divide the brethren that have no basis in Scripture  
**Colossians 2:6-8** – “As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: <sup>7</sup> Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving. <sup>8</sup> Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.”

III. Being people of principle and integrity is a mark of our faith

- A. People lacking faith trust only in their own wisdom
  - 1. They do that which is right in their eyes  
**Judges 21:25** – “In those days *there was* no king in Israel: every man did *that which was* right in his own eyes.”
    - a. In other words there was no authority, no rule
    - b. Every man was governed by his own whims and clever ideas
  - 2. When difficult decisions need to be made they take the easiest course

3. They break God's law even under the guise of keeping it  
The death of James was clearly murder – yet Herod claimed to obey God's law
  - B. People of principle trust by faith that God's wisdom is the best course
    1. We humbly confess our lack of wisdom
    2. To reject God's law in favor of our own course is to deny God's wisdom to care for us
    3. When difficult decisions have to be made, when choices have to be made that have costly repercussions the man of faith trusts God's Word.  
That is what it means to be a person of principle
- IV. Being a person of principle will enable you to stand firm in spite of popular opinion
- A. We must avoid the temptation to be man pleasers
    1. All of us like to be held in high regard of others  
Our pride always seeks the approval of others – no one wants to be disliked
      - a. From the time of our childhood we naturally have desired to be the center of attention – clearly seen in our children
      - b. No one likes the uncomfortable situation of having others displeased with them
    2. The smiles of men must never bring us to forsake our principles  
All of us must maintain the attitude of the apostles when confronted by the religious leaders of their day who commanded them to forsake God's Word  
**Acts 5:29** – "We ought to obey God rather than men."
  - B. Being man-pleasers was a great sin of the Pharisees – they loved the praise of men  
**Matthew 6:5** – "And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are*: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward."
  - C. The love of the praise of men has kept multitudes from fully following Christ  
**John 12:42-43** – "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess *him*, lest they should be put out of the synagogue: For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God."
  - D. There is only one opinion that matters – God's
    1. God is our audience – His opinions are ultimately the only ones that matter.
    2. If we are faithful to Christ and His Word then we can be at peace with both praise and criticism.
    3. Every Christian must guard against being a man pleaser  
We cannot depend upon the opinions of others  
**1 Corinthians 4:3** – "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: . . ."
    4. What does God think of your life?
      - a. It is good that men have a high opinion of you but this is not as important as what God thinks.

- b. It is good to have a clear conscience but we are not justified by our conscience.  
 KJV **1 Corinthians 4:4** – “For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.”  
 ESV **1 Corinthians 4:4** – “I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.”
  - 5. Be true to God and His Word in honor and dishonor in evil report and good report
  - B. Herod forever stands as a warning of those who seek the praise of men
    - 1. There are many who will do whatever it takes to win the approval of men
    - 2. This is the condemnation of many politicians
    - 3. Being a person of principle means living in the audience of One
- V. All of us must resist the temptation to compromise our convictions
- A. We must set up unbreakable standards
    - 1. Doctrinal standards – Biblical theology  
 While some will not endure sound doctrine but after their own lusts shall heap to themselves false teachers we must uphold the truth
    - 2. Biblical Theology makes demands upon our behavior – it controls how we live – it affects our life. This is why they will not endure sound doctrine
  - B. The more we know, the greater our accountability  
**James 4:17** – “Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth *it* not, to him it is sin.”
    - 1. It is more contemptible when we know our duty, yet forsake it
  - C. We must guard every area of our life against compromise
    - 1. Daily moral decisions  
 The cashier gives us too much change  
 We are tempted to lie just a little to justify our actions  
 We find ourselves in a gossip situation with friends
    - 2. It is all about setting standards – standards of holiness, righteousness, purity.  
**Psalm 119:127-128** – “Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold. Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts concerning all things to be right; and I hate every false way.”  
**Romans 14:22** – “Hast thou faith? have *it* to thyself before God. Happy *is* he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth.”