4 secrets about God revealed by the Strict and Particular Baptist Church

By Jack Dunigan

George and his wife were in Oxford as part of an academic sabbatical. Early one Sunday morning, they left their quarters for a walk around the city. When they came upon a cathedral, they decided that since it was yet early for services it would be okay to walk through.

Inside they discovered that while the nave hosted the main church, doors along each side opened into smaller chapels housing different denominations. Finding this fascinating, George and Mrs. George walked slowly through the nave pausing at each to try to determine who met inside them. One they found particularly intriguing.

A set of double doors stood open. Just inside stood a rather stern looking woman, apparently the doorman, so to speak.  Just outside stood an easel on which was a sign that read “The Strict and Particular Baptist Church.” Having not seen or heard of this denomination before, George and Mrs. George stood there for a few minutes pondering what it was that made them strict and particular and just what in the world did congregants do inside a Strict and Particular Baptist church.

Now George and Mrs. George are Americans and thus tend to dress less formally than the British. What’s more, theirs was an early morning walk for which they had harbored no intention of going to church when they left their quarters. So they were not dressed for church.

As they looked inside the Strict and Particular chapel, the woman inside watched them very closely. Finally, the two Americans decided to go inside and see what they could see. Just as they took a step forward, the woman inside reached out, grabbed the two door handles, and pulled the door shut preventing their entrance.

Apparently, the Strict and Particular Baptist church is quite strict and particular, at least in that location.

In my sixty plus years on the planet I’ve seen and fought many battles around church dogma. Looking back on them now I can say with considerable regret that most of them, perhaps 99% were of no consequence whatsoever.

**But, you say, there are rules which must be followed.**

It seems there is an all-too-human propensity to lay down rules of acceptable behavior and approve or disapprove of another’s appearance, manner, vocabulary, body ornamentation (that’s jewelry and or tattoos for you all in Rio Linda), choice of music, places of amusement…well, the list goes on and on.

After all, we reason, we can’t just let anybody in here. This is a place where God comes and we need to make sure everyone is properly put together. That this attitude is merely toxic self-righteousness is simply ignored.

Well, there are rules, but not nearly as many as you think. Leaving aside my arguments against the pursuit of power and control over others which plays heavily into this (which I will discuss soon), let’s take Jesus at his word.

What are the 2 rules?

Love God.

Love each other.

Sorry, folks, but that’s it. There are no more rules. It perfectly and completely encapsulates the totality of what’s right, good, proper. No amount of polity, dogma, or ritual can or should supplant it.

Love God.

Love each other.

I can hear some of you now. “Well, yes, but…”

No “buts.”

**It isn’t complicated even though we have made it so.** I used to own a personal library of nearly 2000 commentaries, analyses, and study books. I gave them all away when I finally realized that I, and countless others like me, had taken the simple and made it oh so complex. It isn’t.

**Nor does it demand our personal explanation even though we would like to believe it does.** Millions of people have, with varying degrees of self-validated authority, explained what must be done to be a spiritually acceptable person. Much of religious broadcasting and church activity is dedicated to explaining who God is and what He wants. It’s been tried for millennia by smarter people than you and me. The result is a constant state of tension about who really should be doing what, overseen by those whose need for control has been self-validated by their own opinion of what’s right.

**Neither does it require our oversight as it is applied to life.** Millions have tried to overlay life and living with their preferred set of rules. Much if not most of Christianity is really not Christianity at all. It is, however, made up of culturally acceptable codes of behavior that have changed with time and will doubtless change with the passing of more time. For example, divorce was once completely unacceptable. Now, it is far more commonplace and accepted (as painful and wrenching as it is) even in church.

**Not everything and not everyone needs fixing.** It seems there is no shortage of people who want to repair you. They focus on flaws or perceived ones and decide they in their wisdom are going to fix what’s wrong. That Jesus specifically came down hard on such actions is irrelevant to them. I remember visiting with an Aunt who was unhappy that Native Americans did not, in her opinion, bathe often enough. “You know,” she reminded me, “the Bible says that cleanliness is next to godliness.”

“Actually,” I replied, “it doesn’t. Nowhere in the Bible does it say that cleanliness is next to godliness.”

Her retort was classic. “Well, it ought to.”

That is the problem, what it actually does say is readily and easily supplanted by what it “ought” to say. Thus the rules and the strictness of that particular Baptist church. (Not picking on Baptists here, just using that one as an illustration.)

Everything we humans have done has made it more complicated, more difficult, more stress filled to become spiritual people. There really are only two rules…

Love God.

Love each other.

Now, if you think that strict and particular is the way you want to go, then have at it. But leave the rest of us alone, please. Like George and Mrs. George, we’re continuing on our journey while that doorkeeper is standing inside that little room. Ours is a much bigger and more interesting world than hers.