fully considering what it states directly, describes through narrative, or draw conclusions from things it indirectly addresses, then what is it? Is it a code? Is it one big metaphor? Is it meant to entertain? Is it a fable to lead us to a larger moral truth irrespective of the specifics it uses to tell us the story? Over the years many have tried to reduce the Bible to these things and far worse. If that is what the Bible is, then nothing really matters! You do your thing, I'll do mine!

The problem is that is not what Scripture says about itself. Jesus said we will be judged by His words (John 12:47-48). He said His disciples must follow His commands (Matt. 28:20). Will those who tell us to reject CENI argue with Jesus? No, but they will likely argue about which commands to follow. Isn't that the point? Isn't that using CENI? How can you prove to me, or how can I prove to you that something is binding? By appealing to biblical evidence! So, you say "not all examples are binding!" Fair enough. If we see biblical variation in following a command (eg., where to meet) we can conclude that there are multiple ways to keep the command. But, if it's done only one way, where is your proof that I can rest my soul upon that we can do it many different ways?

3. How does this impact other biblical principles? Let's go back to the five points we mentioned in the beginning. Many who champion this "anti-CENI" cause will describe past dark experiences in their lives that they now look upon with regret. They mock past efforts to refute denominational error. They ridicule efforts to establish authority for what we do and are quick to zero in on perceived inconsistencies. Certainly, human beings can be inconsistent, unloving, or short-sighted in their efforts to stand firmly upon God's word, but does that mean we reject the effort altogether?

So, if we reject CENI, how do we determine that one has turned "from the truth"? Are not those calling us to reject it accusing us of turning "from the truth"? To what can they appeal? If we must reject CENI then they had better not point to any commands, examples, or inferences! If we reject CENI how can we use Scripture to equip us for "every good work"? If we cannot appeal to what it directly states, describes, or infers, what's left? Yes, it is challenging work to study Scripture. Yes, it can be discouraging when people disagree, dispute, and divide over interpretation, but if we reject CENI how can we still believe that Scripture can be understood? Yes, we must consider issues of generic vs. specific authority. Yes, we must respect the silence of Scripture with consistency and reason. But if we must reject CENI, are how are we to reject error? How can we if there is no objective way to determine error? Are we to accept the Postmodernistic view that there is no such thing as absolute truth? If so, isn't that in itself a truth statement? If we reject CENI, how can we still affirm that Jesus desires unity in doctrine and practice? Proponents of this deconstruction argue that rejecting CENI promotes unity, but in reality, that is just a façade. It is easy to act as if we are all united if we never talk about our differences, or seriously try to resolve them. That is not unity and it is not what Christ prayed for on the night of His betrayal.

Yes, we must maintain consistency. Yes, we must approach all study and teaching of God's word with kindness, patience, and humility, but the answer is not to throw away a commitment to honestly consider what God desires for His people as revealed in the pages of Scripture. This hard work is our duty if we are truly to learn from "the grace of God that brings salvation" that "has appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age" (Titus 2:11-12). May God help us to do this unto His glory.

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ISSUE
25.3
January 15, 2023

Faithful Sayings

BULLETIN OF THE OLSEN PARK CHURCH OF CHRIST

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10:30 AM
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Kyle Pope

Dismantling Bible Authority

By Kyle Pope

CENI is a popular abbreviation referring to the different classifications of evidence used to establish Bible authority. It stands for "direct COMMAND, approved apostolic EXAMPLE, and NECESSARY INFERENCE." In some circles, CENI is now a bad word. It is a target for attack. Those who believe in it are said to be "legalists" or "Pharisees" standing in the way of true "progress," growth, and love. These voices argue that it is an unscriptural, man-made construct, reflecting modern Western thought born out of the Enlightenment but foreign to the biblical world. In their way of thinking, serving Christ demands a rejection and deconstruction of what they see as a "flawed" method of interpretation (or hermeneutic). Is this appraisal of CENI valid? Is it indeed an unbiblical approach to interpretation? What alternatives are we to consider if we are urged to disregard the commands, examples, and inferences offered in Scripture?

Why Does This Matter?

To answer these objections, we must first recognize why a sound approach to biblical interpretation is needed. If all our God expects in service to Him is a broad, varied, and general affection directed towards Him, then differences in personal belief and doctrine, variations in collective practice, and application (or neglect) of biblical principles don't even matter. But, consider a few warnings and instructions we find in Scripture that paint a much different picture:

1. There will be those who turn away from the truth. The apostle Paul warned Timothy, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables" (2 Tim. 4:3-4, NKJV). How are we to determine what constitutes a turning "away from the truth" and a rejection of "sound doctrine"?

2. The inspired Scriptures provide what is necessary to follow Christ. Paul wrote, "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of

God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16-17). The words that were being penned by inspired writers when Paul wrote this would come to be included within what he called "All Scripture." Peter included Paul's epistles within a reference to "Scriptures" (2 Pet. 3:16) and Paul himself told the Corinthians, "the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37b). So, the Bible is intended to equip the child of God for "every good work."

3. Scripture is understandable. Speaking of his own knowledge of God's revelation to him, Paul told the Ephesians, "when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ" (Eph. 3:4). While Scripture is special and unique in that it was produced by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Pet. 1:21), it is not a riddle or puzzle that cannot be discerned without miraculous help. It is a written document that can be understood just as one interprets and grasps any other written material.

4. Disciples of Christ are to reject doctrinal error. The apostle John taught, "Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds" (2 John 9-11). Peter warned that some "twist" the Scriptures "to their own destruction" (2 Pet. 3:16). Paul charged Timothy to, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness" (2 Tim. 2:15-16). If it is possible to "twist" Scripture to one's "destruction," or share in the "evil deeds" of one who "transgresses" the doctrine of Christ, how are we to identify the "word of truth" from "profane and idle babblings"?

5. The Lord wants His people to be united in teaching and practice. On the night of His betrayal, after praying for His apostles, Jesus prayed "for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:20b-21). Paul told the divided Corinthians, "Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment" (1 Cor. 1:10). He taught, the same "ways of Christ"—"everywhere in every church" (1 Cor. 4:17b). Is that still possible or are we to imagine that Christ is now pleased with division and different doctrines "everywhere in every church"?

Is CENI Biblical?

We will return to these points momentarily, but let's consider this charge that using commands, examples, and inferences to discern biblical authority is a modern innovation. I must admit that I would find this almost humorous if it didn't have such serious consequences. Would we accuse the physicists who first discovered electrons of introducing a modern innovation? Of course not! They simply identified within the natural world something that had existed from the time of creation. In the same way, we might admit that using the words "approved apostolic example" or "necessary inference" are relatively modern ways of identifying biblical evidence, but the evidence has been there since the formation of the biblical text. Did ancient writers respect these types of evidence? Absolutely!

Commands. In Mosaic Law, the Lord taught, "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the LORD swore to your fathers" (Deut. 8:1). Under Christ, the apostles were to make disciples, "teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:20a). Does this mean only things directly stated by Jesus while on earth? No. Remember, Paul said, "the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37b). Does this mean any direct statement in Scripture is binding? No, some commands are the commandments of men. In such cases, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Isn't that "legalistic" or being a "Pharisee"? No, it is love. Jesus said, "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments" (John 14:15, NASB). So, it is Scriptural to look to direct commands to establish Bible authority.

Examples. In washing the disciples' feet, Jesus said, "I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:15, NKJV). Paul told the Corinthians, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Does this mean that every apostolic example should be followed? No. At first the apostles deserted Jesus (Mark 14:50), betrayed Him (John 18:5), or denied Him (Luke 21:61-62). Later, Peter was not "straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (Gal. 2:15). Those are examples identified in Scripture as bad examples. We should not follow them, but Paul told the Philippians, "The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil. 4:9). So, yes, it is scriptural to follow approved apostolic examples.

Inferences. An *inference* is defined as "a conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning" (*New Oxford American Dictionary*). No major English translation uses the word "inference," but several use the word "conclusion." Solomon ends his own inspired book by writing, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all" (Eccl. 12:13). He draws the inspired inference from what has previously been written that reverence and obedience are the "whole duty of man" (KJV). In teaching the Corinthians that prayer and song without understanding are useless, Paul asks, "What is [the conclusion] then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding" (1 Cor. 14:15, NKJV). We note that the editors of the NKJV supply the words "the conclusion." NASB supplies instead the words "the outcome." The text is literally just the question, "What is it then?" (KJV) or "So what shall I do?" (NIV). Paul asks the reader to draw an inference and explains the conclusion that one should draw. Perhaps the best example of an inescapable conclusion in the New Testament is found in Galatians 3:16, where Paul draws the inference that the promise of blessing in Abraham's "Seed" (not "to seeds") pointed specifically to Christ. Here, a conclusion is drawn based on the singular form of one word! Clearly, it is scriptural to look to necessary inferences to establish biblical authority.

What the Critics Are Missing

As you listen to the arguments made by critics of CENI I think there are a few things they overlook.

1. What's the Alternative? Ours is not the first generation that has sought an alternative to objectively following the text of Scripture. Catholic and Eastern Orthodox theology rests on the premise that Scripture and church tradition stand as co-equal sources for establishing Divine authority. Are we to accept that alternative? If so, how do we explain dramatic changes and departures from consistent teaching within church tradition?

Some critics charge members of the church with being inconsistent when citing evidence from early church writers in support of the Lord's Supper on Sunday or non-instrumental worship under Christ. The early church did not form in a vacuum. The writings that have been preserved after the New Testament demonstrate both the earliest departures from the apostolic patterns and examples of early adherence to the teaching and practices of the first century. No, they are not equal in authority to the words of Scripture, but it is reasonable to consider their claims in evaluating biblical evidence (just as they often inform us about biblical vocabulary).

A premise of Calvinistic and Charismatic theology is that man cannot understand Scripture without the supernatural assistance of the Holy Spirit. That was not true in the New Testament. Paul taught that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). He told the Ephesians "when you read you can understand" the things he wrote to them (Eph. 3:4). Now, not all critics of CENI are Calvinists or Charismatics, but we must not ignore that often these same voices devote much energy to convincing their listeners that the Holy Spirit stands ready to "do more" in their lives than they have "allowed Him to" in the past. Is their alternative to CENI a reliance upon where they perceive the Holy Spirit is leading them? If so, isn't it interesting that so many of these claiming to rely more on the leading of the Holy Spirit almost universally are led to reject principles demonstrated in the text inspired by the Holy Spirit? Have we forgotten that, "God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints" (1 Cor. 14:33)? I fear that often, the motive behind this opposition to CENI stems from a personal desire to do things brethren through the years have deemed unscriptural. If so, and they are interpreting their own strong desires as the leading of the Holy Spirit, I would call them to remember the warning given to Ezekiel, "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing!'" (Ezek. 13:3).

2. What does this say about Scripture? If the inspired text is not a document that can be evaluated and understood by care-