

## CENI

Is CENI a scriptural method of establishing authority?

### Introduction

1. A sincere Christian will have an intense craving to study the scriptures that he may grow thereby (**1 Peter 2:1-3**). There are several books and topics that are essential to study at the beginning of our Christian life; one such essential topic is *authority*.
2. Our aim as Christians is to be pleasing to the Lord (**2 Corinthians 5:9; Colossians 1:9-10**), which we can only do if we understand His will (**Ephesians 5:17**). The will of God is revealed in the scriptures (**1 Corinthians 2:7-13; cp. Jude 1:3**) and so we must read and study them diligently (**1 Peter 2:1-3; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-17; 2 Peter 1:2-4**).
  - a. It is essential to abide in the will of God to remain in fellowship with Him (**John 14:15, 21; 15:10; 1 John 3:24**). We must ensure, therefore, that we abide in the doctrine of Christ (i.e., in the teachings of Christ) (**2 John 1:9**).
  - b. Abiding in the doctrine of Christ means we must make sure that we have authority for all that we do (**Colossians 3:17; cp. Matthew 28:18**).
3. If it is essential to make sure that we do all things by Christ's authority (**Colossians 3:17**), then it is also essential to understand *how* authority is established. This we do by looking for direct Commands, approved apostolic Examples, and Necessary Inferences (CENI).
4. However, some claim that this method is not biblical, but simply a hermeneutic from man's imagination. The aim of this lesson is to prove that CENI is biblical.

HOW AUTHORITY IS ESTABLISHED  
Authority is established by...



### COMMANDS, EXAMPLES, AND NECESSARY INFERENCE

#### A. Commands are found throughout the New Testament:

1. Paul says, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches<sup>1</sup>" (**Galatians 6:6**). This is not a suggestion, it is a command.
2. Paul says, "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (**2 Corinthians 6:14**). This is not a suggestion, it is a command.
3. Paul says, "...that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation..." (**1 Timothy 2:9**). This is not a suggestion, it is a command.

We refer to commands to establish authority for what we do.

#### B. Examples are found throughout the New Testament:

1. We know that we must partake of the Lord's Supper because Jesus commanded it, saying, "Do this in remembrance of Me" (**Luke 22:19; 1 Corinthians 11:24-25**). How often should we partake of it? It is evident that the Corinthians knew how often to partake of it because Paul simply says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup..." (**1 Corinthians 11:26**). But there is no command telling us when to partake of it. We do, however, have an example: while in Troas, Luke notes, "Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread..." (**Acts 20:7**). Since the apostle Paul himself partook with them, we have here an apostolically approved example.
2. Can a church send relief to another church if it is in need? The prophet Agabus warned of a famine that was to come throughout all the world and then "the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren which dwelt in Judea: which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul" (**Acts 11:27-30**). It is by this apostolically approved example that we know that one church is authorised to send another church relief when it is in need.

We refer to apostolically approved examples to establish authority for what we do.

<sup>1</sup> Each member of the church has an individual responsibility to financially support him that teaches. This is a command that preachers often find is neglected.

3. Can a congregation send support to a preacher? While there is no direct command to a congregation to send support to a preacher, we do have apostolically approved examples. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul says, “I robbed other churches, taking wages from them to minister to you” (2 Corinthians 11:8), and he said to the Philippians, “...no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only” (Philippians 4:15).

C. Necessary inferences are found throughout the New Testament:

We refer to necessary inferences to establish authority for what we do.

1. Quoting from Joel 2:32, Paul says, “Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Romans 10:13). Now notice the series of inferences he draws from this verse: he infers (i) before one could call, he must first believe, (ii) before believing one must hear, (iii) before one can hear, a preacher must be sent. Thus, what is implied, we may infer.
2. The frequency of the observance of the Lord’s Supper is established by necessary inference. Luke says, “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread...” (Acts 20:7). Someone might say, “Good for them! But it doesn’t say they met every week”. True, on its own, this example does not prove they partook of the Lord’s Supper every first day of the week, but when considered together with all the evidence, there is no other conclusion<sup>2</sup>.

3. In the book of Acts, Luke relates how Philip came across an Ethiopian eunuch reading from Isaiah. Philip asked him if he understood what he read and the eunuch asked how he could understand unless he had someone to guide him. He then invited him into his chariot. Luke then says that – beginning at the scripture the eunuch was reading – he “preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:26-35). Further along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptised?” (Acts 8:36). How did the eunuch know that he needed to be baptised? We necessarily infer that preaching Jesus involves teaching that one must be baptised (when studied alongside with all the passages on baptism, we conclude that he was baptised for the remission of sins).



4. The following are three classic passages in which conclusions are drawn by necessary inference:

- a. A study of Acts 15 illustrates that, when the early disciples needed to answer the question of the necessity of circumcision for Gentile Christians, CENI was used to determine the Lord’s will.
  - 1) Peter cited his experience at Cornelius’ house, concluding from the fact that the Gentiles there received the Holy Spirit that God “acknowledged them” and “made no distinction between” Jew and Gentile (Acts 15:7-9). God never explicitly stated that conclusion; Peter inferred it from the evidence that God provided in the giving of the Holy Spirit. It was, in fact, a necessary inference, meaning that no other conclusion could be drawn. Peter likewise necessarily inferred that God was not talking about unclean animals in his vision of Acts 10.
  - 2) Paul and Barnabas related to the brethren assembled in Jerusalem “how God had worked through them among the Gentiles” (Acts 15:12). As those who taught that Gentiles could be saved without circumcision, they represented the answer to the question by approved (by God) example. It could also be noted that the conclusion that their example was approved is by necessary inference. One must infer from the fact that God empowered them to perform miracles that their conduct was approved.
  - 3) James quoted a statement from Amos which predicted that Gentiles would be “called by” the name of the Lord (Acts 15:16). Although not stated in the form of a command, the prophecy of Amos is the citation of a precept which also answered the question of circumcision.

<sup>2</sup> see [www.bible.ca/7-sunday-significance-for-christians.htm](http://www.bible.ca/7-sunday-significance-for-christians.htm) and <http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1254>

- b. The Sadducees didn't believe in the resurrection and they put a question to Jesus to show, as they supposed, the absurdity of such a notion: "Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her. Jesus answered and said to them, You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I **am** the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching" (**Matthew 22:23-33**). Jesus proved that there would be a resurrection, not from a direct statement and not from an example, but from an inference based on the tense of a word: God didn't say He was the God of Abraham or He would be the God of Abraham, but He said, "I **am** the God of Abraham..." "Here the Lord opposes the heresy of the Sadducees, saying, 'God is not the God of the dead, i.e., of men who have altogether perished, but of the living, i.e., of those who have immortal souls, and though they are now dead will rise again.' Strictly speaking, the argument of Jesus is an argument for human immortality, but to Jewish minds the idea of immortality necessarily carried with it the idea of a resurrection" (Dummelow).
- c. Speaking of the priesthood of Jesus Christ, the Hebrew writer says: "For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Judah; of which tribe Moses said nothing concerning priesthood." Under the Old Covenant, Jesus could not be a priest because He did not come from the order of Aaron in the tribe of Levi. In regard to the Levitical priesthood, Moses said nothing about Judah (**Hebrews 7:14**). Yet Jesus is a priest! How is this possible? The only necessary conclusion we can draw is that there must have been a change of law. This is exactly what the writer says two verses earlier: "For the priesthood being changed, of necessity there is also a change of the law" (**Hebrews 7:12**).

## Conclusion

1. There are those that claim that CENI is not biblical, but simply a hermeneutic from man's imagination. However, far from being a human tradition, this is exactly how the will of God was determined since the beginning of time. We suspect that the rejection of this method of scripture interpretation is motivated by a desire to allow more "freedom" in our practices. The need for divine authority in religion is too restrictive for many who want to gratify their own desires rather than glorify God.
2. As we consider all that we say and do, we must ensure that the Lord Jesus authorizes it (**Colossians 3:17**). We can see, then, that studying this important topic is essential because we cannot be unified in faith and practice otherwise.

## A Conversation On The Subject Of Authority

Several years ago, I was discussing the use of mechanical instruments in worship with a man that had been preaching for 48 years. I asked him if he could provide a direct command for the use of mechanical instruments. He could not. I asked if he could show me an example of a church that used them. He could not. I asked him if there was a verse that necessarily implied their use. He said there wasn't. So I asked, "So why do you use them?" He answered, "There is no verse that specifically condemns using them". I answered, saying, "I think your whole approach is wrong...we ought not to search the scriptures for things that are not specifically condemned and then practice those things, we ought to make sure we have authority for all that we do [**Colossians 3:17**]" He then said, "Well, I think you're being a little hypocritical! You condemn us for using mechanical instruments without having authority and yet you also do many things without authority". So, of course, I asked, "Like what?" He said, "You meet in a rented building – where is the authority for that? You use song books – where is the authority for that? You have Bible classes – where is the authority for that?"



I just sat there speechless and stared at him. A smirk appeared on his face because he interpreted my speechlessness and stare as a sign of defeat. However, if anything, they were signs of my disbelief of his ignorance and foolish arguments. (i) I could hardly believe that a man who had been a preacher for 48 years could be so ignorant regarding how we establish authority, and (ii) I could hardly believe the foolishness of his argument: “You do things without authority, so we can do things without authority”. NO! If you know you’re doing something without authority, then you should stop doing it!

If someone challenged you to show them where the authority is for a congregation to own or rent a building in which to meet, use hymn books, and have Bible classes, would you be able to do so?

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