

Speak as the Oracles of God

If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen (1 Peter 4:11).

In Lesson 2 of this study, we introduced the idea of *authority*. There, we discussed briefly what authority (in general) is and the need for it in the spiritual realm. Now, we want to extend that idea a bit to begin to understand how we look at what has been revealed and make applications to our own lives. How do we understand the word? And how then do we teach it?

First, we want to examine the question: How important is the written word? The answer to this question is wrapped up in understanding what the written word actually is. Again, returning to Lesson 2 of this study, we can be reminded that Jesus promised His disciples that He would send the Holy Spirit to them, and they would be guided into “all truth” (John 16:12-15; Lesson 2, pp. 10-11). Paul, as he wrote to the Ephesian brethren, revealed how this was accomplished through him, which was the same manner as the other inspired writers:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power (Ephesians 3:1-7).

Paul said that the Holy Spirit revealed the word to the apostles and prophets. These men wrote down the word that was revealed to them, and all who read what was written can understand this revelation of the mystery of Christ. His point is that the mystery has been revealed, or solved! We can understand what the mind of God is, as He has revealed it to these apostles and prophets through the Holy Spirit. When we understand that the words revealed through the Holy Spirit to the apostles and prophets, and written down by them, are the word of God Himself, then we have answered the question of how important the written word is! It is of utmost importance, as it reveals to us the very mind of Jehovah!

Bible Authority vs. Divine Authority

Sometimes, as we discuss the authority expressed in the scriptures, we use the term *Bible Authority*. If we understand the chain of authority that we have expressed in the first part of this lesson, then there should be no issue with that terminology. However, as is often the case, it may be difficult to fully express those ideas sufficiently. Simply using the term *Bible Authority* without setting a solid foundation seems arbitrary. Why should this book be considered authoritative? For this reason, I prefer the term *Divine Authority*. Rather than emphasizing the authority of the finished product (the Bible) we are now emphasizing the authority of the source of the material (God). Authority is inherent in God. The only reason that the Bible has authority is because it is from the source of all authority! As we discuss the principles of authority as found in scriptures, we must recognize that

we are examining principles that are authoritative because they are from God Himself. Even as we read the words of the apostles, we realize that they are not important because of the men themselves, but rather because they were simply revealing the words that God gave to them. They are not telling us their ideas and opinions, they are telling us what God revealed. This is why Peter's admonition in 1 Peter 4:11 is of such great importance (see previous page). It expresses the importance of speaking only "as the oracles of God." The apostles had no inherent authority. They only possessed the authority that had been conveyed upon them by the Lord.

Men today have no inherent authority. For their words to hold authority, they can only "speak as the oracles of God." Understanding this principle could certainly make things clearer in the religious realm! How often do we hear a question asked that begins with, "What do you think about...?" Unfortunately, the typical response begins with, "I think..." The problem with this approach is that it supposes that the opinions of men are somehow authoritative! In fact, they are not. The real question should be, "What does God think about...?" Our goal should always be to come to an understanding of the mind of God!

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord (Ephesians 5:8–10 NKJV).

...for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord (Ephesians 5:8–10 ESV).

We should be looking at what He has revealed to understand what is "acceptable" and "pleasing" to Him! What men decide to accept is immaterial. What God has revealed constitutes truth (John 17:15-19).

Helping to Understand...

Sometimes, there are difficult things in the word of God. Peter acknowledged this very fact:

Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation—as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures (2 Peter 3:14–16).

Because of this, there is a need to explain what is found within the scriptures. There are two examples we can bring to the reader's attention of this process. The first is the example of Philip teaching the Eunuch. When Philip came upon this man, he was reading from the prophet Isaiah, but did not understand what he was reading. He needed Philip to explain some of what was in that particular context, so that he could understand the mind of God (See Acts 8:26-40). Philip, "beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus..." Philip was explaining what was in the passage. He was not speaking from his own opinions and ideas. He was using the principles of communication to take what was written and explain it in a way that was understandable to the Eunuch!

The second example is found in Nehemiah 8. After the return of the children of Israel from captivity, they were woefully ignorant of God's word. In Nehemiah 8, Ezra was tasked with having the law read to the people so that they would understand what God expected of them. However, it was evident that the people needed some help in understanding the word of the Lord. They needed further explanation of what was meant by the words that they were hearing. Because of this, Ezra appointed

some men to help with the understanding of the word of God:

Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodijah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, helped the people to understand the Law; and the people stood in their place. So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading (Nehemiah 8:7-8).

Notice, these men gave the sense of what was being read. So, the Law was first read, then some men gave the sense, or a summary of the reading. Then, they worked to help others to understand what was being said. They were not just giving their opinions. They used the principles of communication to help the people understand what was being taught by the Scriptures.

Our responsibility is to take the written word and convey to others what God revealed. Confusion occurs, as well as contradictions, when men insert their own thoughts into God's word. Exegesis is the process of study in which a person seeks to draw out of the passage all that God intends. It is learning the mind of God. Eisegesis is a process of study where a person already has their own ideas, and reads those into the passages. The difference is that the first puts emphasis on what God desires, the second puts emphasis on what men desire.

The challenge becomes that we must take the written word, and from it learn what God has revealed for us to do. Setting aside all of our own desires and prejudices to identify what is pleasing and acceptable to the Lord is not an easy task! It will take diligence and commitment to Him.

The Need for Authority...

So as to not be too repetitive, please review Lesson 2 of this study manual to refresh your memory on some of the concepts of authority that we have already established. There, we discussed in some detail the need for authority, and an understanding of what authority, in general, is. We are now going to return to that basic concept in order to build on it with more specifics.

In nearly every aspect of our lives, we recognize and accept the need for authority. There must be standards by which we can operate, else there would be complete anarchy. Someone has to have the power to make the rules, and the rest have to be willing to submit to those rules. This is true in all areas of our lives. Consider just a few examples:

On The Job. When a person takes a job, he submits himself to the rules of the company and the boss for which he works. Most companies have an employee manual that specifies what is expected of each employee. Those who choose to ignore the rules will not be employed for very long!

Sports. There are rules that must be followed when playing any type of sport, else there will be complete chaos on the field. Can you imagine trying to play the game of baseball, for example, where one team, or even one person, insisted on rejecting the authority of the rule book? Or, imagine that someone involved in the game began to make up their own rules based solely on what they liked or preferred! There could be no rhyme nor reason to the proceedings, and it certainly could never be a fair competition.

Taking measurements. If a group of 10 people were asked to tell how tall a particular tree was, chances are there would be 10 different answers. However, if one was to produce a tape measure with which to measure the tree, the controversy would be immediately resolved. Why? Because they had a standard that they could all agree on! Once the tree is measured, there is no more guessing. The proper authority has been consulted.

Driving. Before attaining a driver's license, people have to take a test to show that they are competent be on the roads with all the other drivers. They are given a driving manual that contains most

of the driving laws for the state in which they will be acquiring a license. Once a license is earned, drivers can choose to ignore the laws that they were taught, however that could lead to an encounter with a law enforcement officer. Failure to comply with the rules could be met with some serious consequences.

There are many other examples that could be used to illustrate the point: we recognize and accept authority in every aspect of our lives! What do these examples have in common? We can identify the proper source of authority and can submit to it. If the janitor at work tells the vice president what he should be doing, he will most likely be ignored. If one of the players in a baseball game suddenly starts making up new rules to benefit his team, we would think his actions ludicrous. If one of our men asked to guess the height of the tree insisted he was right, even after being proven wrong by the tape measure, we would think him to be crazy. And, if a pedestrian on the street wrote us a ticket and tried to force us to pay him for some made up traffic violation, we would ignore him. None of these people has the authority to make or enforce these rules! There are, however, accepted sources of authority in each of these cases. And, if those accepted sources of authority are appealed to, civil adults submit themselves to them.

Sources of Authority in the Spiritual Realm

While many will accept the role of authority in every other aspect of their lives, when it comes to spiritual matters they balk at the idea. Instead of looking for the instructions that ensure they are practicing God's will, they reject the idea of any source of authority.

However, Jesus Himself identified the source of authority in the spiritual realm:

And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen. (Matthew 28:18–20)

In the previous lesson, we saw that Jesus conferred part of that authority to the inspired writers, such as the apostle Paul, to record the information that He wanted His people to know for all time. This helps us to understand what the source of authority in the spiritual realm should be. Jesus is the ultimate source, and the instruction He conveyed through His inspired writers after His ascension carries that same authority.

We have the authority of Christ revealed to us through the scriptures:

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. (Ephesians 3:1–7)

Paul received the “mystery of Christ” through Divine inspiration. What he wrote carried the same authority as if Jesus had spoken it Himself. There are many in the religious world who want to be “red letter Christians.” That is, they want to limit their faith and practice to only that which is printed in red letters in a Red Letter Edition of the Bible, designating the words directly spoken by Christ. In truth, everything revealed through the Holy Spirit through the inspired writers bears the same authority as the words spoken by Jesus Himself. Keep in mind the principle we saw in the

previous lesson: Jesus knew that He had not given the disciples all of the information they needed, and that He would send the Holy Spirit to them to finish the revelation that was necessary (John 14:22-26, 16:12-15).

This is why we can know that there is a need to use all the scriptures to formulate our spiritual understanding and practice. We have to be willing (and able) to use all that God has given to us to develop our relationship with Him. This is why Paul could write to Timothy and express the importance of the use of scripture:

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 Timothy 3:16-17)

God has given, through scripture, all that we need to be spiritually complete and absolutely prepared for every type of good work, as defined by Him.

Improper Sources of Authority

While we can look to God's revelation to understand what He has established as the source of authority, there are other places that men turn to in an attempt to establish their authority for belief and practice in the spiritual arena. We should, therefore, address some of these improper sources of authority. These are not sources that should be appealed to or trusted!

Human traditions. People get to the point that they like to do things the way that they have always done them. Many practices have no Biblical foundation, but the participants have been involved in them for so long, they cannot imagine not participating! Jesus Himself addressed this issue, as it had already become a problem among the Jews in the first century, even before the institution of the church. This was a problem that was brought over into the church and continues to be an issue even today:

He answered and said to them, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? For God commanded, saying, 'Honor your father and your mother'; and, 'He who curses father or mother, let him be put to death.' But you say, 'Whoever says to his father or mother, 'Whatever profit you might have received from me is a gift to God'—then he need not honor his father or mother.' Thus you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition. Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, And honor Me with their lips, But their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' " (Matthew 15:3-9)

Just because something has become traditional does not make it right! The Jews had many things that they did that were traditional that directly violated the instructions of God. Jesus condemned such practices. Traditions that are contrary to God's instructions today are just as wrong as they were in the first century!

Human desires. This is closely related to the previous point, as human traditions find their origin in human desires. Our natural inclination is to gravitate toward the things that we like to do. The problem arises when our desires are not the same as God's desires (they are rarely the same when left to our own devices). Going all the way back to Jeremiah's time, we can see that this was a problem:

O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself; It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. (Jeremiah 10:23)

Men today still think that they should "direct [their] own steps." They devise practices that make them happy when it comes to their religious beliefs, and the work and worship of the church. Lat-

er in our studies we will be taking a much closer look at these aspects of our service before God. For now, we need to see that our desires are not what should drive our practices, but rather God's desires, which He has recorded for us through the pens of His inspired writers. Just because we like some practice does not mean that God has approved or accepted it.

Human creeds or Confessions of Faith. Many religious bodies have official written documents, framing what disciples of those particular faiths are supposed to believe, teach, and practice. These are not aids to help their followers understand the Bible, but rather books that are written by man, defining what must be believed. Those who are not willing to conform, at least in most cases, are restricted from being a part of the organization. Those who will not conform to the denomination's creed certainly are not permitted to be leaders or teachers in their churches.

Practices can not be prescribed by men. Men only have the ability to use the authority that Christ has dispersed. When books of faith contradict what is given by God, then we know that is a source of authority that is not approved of by God!

The Old Testament Scriptures. Many people today make an attempt to appeal to the practices of the Old Testament to either accept or reject something. While there is much that can be learned from the Old Testament scriptures (Romans 15:4), it is imperative to understand that Christ, with His death, wiped out the requirements of the Old Testament scripture:

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father. (Ephesians 2:14–18)

When we discuss specific practices, we need to be very cautious about appealing to Old Testament practices. There are some principles that we are intended to draw from the Old Testament, but God has not left us that scripture as instructions on how to act, specifically, under the New Testament covenant.

Past family practices. This could be one of the hardest problems to get past when trying to share the uncompromised gospel with people today. They are convinced that "Whatever was good enough for grandmother is good enough for me!" It should be easy for us to realize that people are imperfect and can be mistaken. If we follow our family into error simply because we overvalue their authority, we end up all being deceived (Matthew 15:12-14). Our relatives, if they have a proper respect for God, would want us to follow the truth, even if that leads away from the family history!

We must seek to follow the true source of authority: Jesus Christ and His revealed word. If we are distracted by those things that pose as legitimate sources of authority, but are not, we will be led far away from God and His true will for us.

Listening to the Lord...

In 1 Samuel 3, the account of Samuel's life as an assistant to Eli the high priest begins. As Samuel was lying in his bed God spoke to him, but Samuel did not know what was happening. Three times he heard the voice of the Lord, and three times he went to Eli, thinking he was the one who had called him. Finally, Eli realized what was happening and told Samuel what he needed to do:

Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and it shall be, if He calls you, that you must say, 'Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.' " So Samuel went and lay down in his place. (1 Samuel 3:9)

Samuel did as he was instructed by Eli, and sure enough, the Lord came and spoke to him, telling him what was going to happen. This was the beginning of Samuel's role as a prophet and the last judge over Israel.

We are particularly interested in the attitude shown by Samuel as he followed Eli's instructions. This attitude was evident throughout the life of Samuel, even from this young age. In his example, we see a boy (1 Samuel 3:1) who was willing to wait on the word of the Lord to be spoken to him. Throughout his lifetime, it is evident that he maintained this respect for the word of the Lord, responding through his actions with, "Speak Lord, for your servant hears." This attitude reflects the fact that Samuel viewed God as authoritative: His word meant something important! It also reflected that Samuel viewed himself as a servant. As a servant, he was under the authority of God and was to respond in obedience to Him.

This is the very same type of attitude we should have toward the word of the Lord. Things have changed since Samuel's time, in that God does not audibly speak to individuals today, but He has revealed His mind to us. The Hebrew writer reveals how this transition has taken place:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds... (Hebrews 1:1-2)

In previous lessons, we have established the process through which we have the mind of Christ revealed to us through the Holy Spirit and the inspired apostles. Jesus told His apostles that He would send the Holy Spirit who would reveal unto them "all truth" (John 16:13). If the Holy Spirit did just as the Lord Himself claimed that He would, then those first century apostles received all truth! If that is the case, then there is no new revelation for men to receive today, as that would be something other than "all truth" which was received by the apostles in the first century!

Paul confirms this idea in his letter to the Galatian brethren:

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:6-9)

Paul could already, while in the first century, declare that the gospel had been delivered. If someone came preaching some other message than what the Galatians had already heard, they could know it was not truth. Anything that has been "revealed" after the life of the inspired men of the first century (who received all truth) cannot be truth!

Once we discover that the Bible contains "all truth" as revealed by God through the inspired writers, we must learn how to decipher it. Having the proper attitude, the attitude of Samuel, will help us to ensure that we understand and implement God's will just as He intends. While some want to push the idea that we can have different interpretations of scripture and still all be correct, that is simply not possible. Until we understand a passage the way that God intended for it to be understood, we cannot have the right interpretation! We can illustrate disagreement over how a passage is to be understood in this manner:

- I can be right, and you can be wrong.
- You can be right, and I can be wrong.
- We can both be wrong.

- We CANNOT both be right!

Only when we come to understand what God truly communicated can we have the correct interpretation. God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33). If men disagree over what God has revealed, then men are the ones who have a problem in understanding. God has revealed His mind so that mankind can understand, and understand it alike!

How God Communicates

As we begin this section of our study, we want to make it clear that God has communicated His mind in the very same manner that men communicate. We are not here discussing the procedure of His revelation, as we have already discussed that to some extent. Here we want to consider the methodology of His communication. For communication to be effective, one party has to express an idea in some way that a second party can comprehend and put into practice.

For many years, a common manner of expressing the way that this communication occurred has been shortened down to a memorable acronym: CENI (command, example, and necessary inference). However, this manner of establishing practices from scripture has come under attack, with many claiming that it is unbiblical. This is one area that we sometimes seem to get hung up on the terminology, rather than understanding what that terminology expresses. There is some irony in this, as the point is to convey a principle, and instead of grasping that principle, we spend much more time arguing over the validity of the terms! Doy Moyer, in an attempt to head off such disagreement, has expressed the methodology of communication (all communication) in slightly different terms.¹ Rather than using the aforementioned terms, Moyer uses terms that reflect the manner in which all communication takes place. If we want someone to comprehend what is in our mind, we must relate it to them in a very limited number of ways.

In an article entitled *It's How Communication Works*², Moyer expressed the idea in this way:

How is anyone's will communicated?

We start by asking this basic question because it gets right to the heart of the issue. How do you communicate your will to someone else? If you want to communicate your desire that someone do or consider something, how would you go about it?

I have searched long and hard. I have studied works in interpretation and communication, and I'm trying to boil this down to the basic elements. The following ways are how anyone communicates anything:

1. *We tell someone what we want. This is direct and can be an order or statement.*
2. *We show someone what we want and how to do it. Illustrations and examples are part of this process.*
3. *We imply what we expect others to get by what we say or show. This can even be done through gestures and silence.*

Can you think of any other way than to tell, show, or imply what you want? This is logic at the most fundamental level, and the principles we are discussing here are what we would call self-evident. Something is self-evident when it is true in itself. Such is the case with tell, show, and imply. How can we demonstrate this?

¹ Doy Moyer has written extensively on the subject of Bible Authority, and has given this author permission to reproduce some of his materials in this study booklet. You can read more of brother Moyer's work on his website: <http://www.mindyourfaith.com/biblical-authority.html>

² <http://www.mindyourfaith.com/the-authority-blog/its-how-communication-works>

It is obvious that any attempt at communication will utilize one or more of these ways of communication. Try to communicate without it! I would issue this challenge if you disagree with what I'm saying: go ahead and disagree, but don't tell me anything about it, don't show me anything about it, and don't imply your disagreement. To do so would be self-defeating, for you will utilize the very process you are denying. Such cannot be done, and we would logically collapse on ourselves by thinking otherwise. Tell, show, and imply are logically self-evident. No further proof is needed, and objections to this are self-defeating and logically incoherent.

Does this come from God or man? Since our ability to 1) think logically, and 2) communicate comes from God, then it does come from God as the way communication works. It is, again, so fundamental that we cannot communicate without it. God made us creatures with the need and ability to communicate, and this is how it is done. To help us understand God's authority, then, we need to start with the logical premises and show that there is no way around how communication works. We are simply reminding people of the fundamental logic that underlies all communication, including God's.

We understand how this process works when it comes to our interactions with other men. If our boss, or our teacher, or our coach wants us to do something, one or more of these methods of communicating their desires will be implemented. We do not have any problem with this process, as it is simply the way in which one person conveys what he wants another person to do. It is, as is the article's premise, how communication works!

Moyer connected these thoughts to the idea of CENI in a very profitable manner:

The CENI Connection

Many are familiar with the terminology, "Command, Example, and Necessary Inference." These are the very concepts that are often challenged in discussions about God's authority. In fact the acronym CENI has been the object of much ridicule and is often used pejoratively.

"Command, Example, and Necessary Inference" are simply the formal, specific ways of saying "tell, show, and imply." The terms appeal to the very same process. Therefore, when people complain about CENI as if there is something fundamentally flawed about it, they really are showing that the fundamental logic has not been thought through. This is exactly why we need to talk about it. (Note: I prefer TSI, as I'll refer to it, to CENI for the simple reason that it is more encompassing of the communication process – "tell" includes more than just commands; however, the point remains that CENI is just a specified way of speaking about the same process).

The problem is not with CENI itself. I would suggest that if we do a better job explaining the foundational logic of communication, there wouldn't be such a backlash later against CENI as some alleged man-made construct. It's not a man-made construct at all; it's the fancy talk for how communication works at the most basic of levels. God tells us what He wants; He shows us what He wants, and He implies what He expects us to get. It's up to us to think it out and think it through.

Consequently, I have, a few times, challenged those who don't like CENI. When challenged, they have typically backed up admitted something like this: "Well, I agree that God communicates that way, but I don't like how it is applied." Now you might disagree over some of the applications, but don't attack the principles themselves, for that is attacking the communication process, and it is self-defeating to do so. Start with a solid foundation.

There are many who want to insist that CENI is a failed hermeneutic, and needs to be replaced. However, even those making such a claim have nothing with which to replace it. It should be pointed out that in reality, CENI, or Moyer's Tell, Show, Imply (TSI) is not a hermeneutic, but rather the foundation of such. Consider Moyer's last section of the cited article:

Is CENI a Hermeneutic?

Is CENI or TSI a hermeneutical method? I sometimes see the criticism of it as a failed hermeneutic (method of interpretation), but this misses the point of it. TSI is foundational to any form of communication. It is inherent in any spoken or written communication (not just in studying the Bible). It is not, in itself, a hermeneutic, but is rather foundational to any hermeneutic. Any hermeneutic will assume the self-evident reality of TSI.

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. It is what we as the recipients (readers, hearers) bring to the communication process. TSI, on the other hand, is inherent in what the communicator gives. That is, we, the readers or listeners, do not provide TSI; we take the TSI that is given to us and try to understand what that means. TSI, then, is not a method of interpretation; it is the material that we interpret. We might misinterpret it. We might fail to get out of it what is intended. We might make more of examples and inferences than we ought to. But it is nevertheless the raw material that we use in order to understand what the author or speaker intends. There is no getting around this. No one interprets anything that is not first told, shown, or implied.

What is told, shown, and implied are the bare bones of what we work with when we interpret. Criticizing it as a failed hermeneutic is to misunderstand it at the most basic level. Instead of criticizing it, let's recognize it for what it is (inherent in the communication process) and then deal with how we should properly understand the statements, examples, and implications.

It's how communication works, and how communication works is fundamental to the process of understanding how God communicates with us. Most of the time we just communicate. We don't usually stop and think about the process. For understanding how God communicates His will to us, however, sometimes we just need to start with the basics. What has He said? What examples has He provided? What is to be inferred from the material He has provided? It's up to us to properly interpret it all.

Whether we call it CENI or TSI or some other acronym that is descriptive of the process, we need to understand that we are merely describing the way that communication occurs. It is how we communicate with one another, and it is the basis by which God has communicated with us. Through His scriptures, He has revealed His mind in each of these ways.

It behooves us to respond to what God has communicated. When we have the attitude of Samuel, we will not seek to dismiss what God has revealed because we have convinced ourselves that we are merely following a man made hermeneutic. What is revealed in scripture (through God telling us something, showing us something, or providing information from which we as reasonable people can infer something) is the mind of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11).

All of this is God speaking to us. How we respond to what He has revealed will determine if we have a relationship with Him. Convincing ourselves that we are somehow more spiritual because we reject the manner in which God has revealed His mind is a spiritually destructive ploy of the devil himself, to draw us away from the will of the Lord.

Instead, we should simply say: Speak Lord, for your servant hears.

Questions...

1. What difference is there between the terminology *Bible Authority* versus *Divine Authority*?
 2. How might we help to give the meaning of a passage, without inserting our man-made opinions into the principles expressed?
 3. List at least 3 improper sources of authority in the spiritual realm.
 4. What kind of attitude did Samuel have when the Lord spoke to Him? How might we reflect this same type of attitude today?
 5. Describe 3 ways that we communicate with other people today. How are these the same/different than the ways that God has communicated with us?
 6. What do the acronyms *CENI* and *TSI* stand for?
 7. What is a hermeneutic? Should we view CENI or TSI as a hermeneutic? Why or why not?

