

Core Values

seven: conversation

November 5, 2017

Courage Church, Detroit, MI.

scriptures: Matthew 16:13-20,
Matthew 18:15-20, Acts 15, 1
Corinthians 6:12, Jeremiah 31:33



As you know, we have been addressing our core values... or you could say our “co-values” - because each and every one of these things so far, are things that we do together.

I hope that you guys are kind of seeing, from this series, that this fall we have really been trying to pour into and grow our CORE.

We believe that God has given us a mission, and we have really been asking him to show us, and show everyone, “what are the things that we need to make absolutely sure are engrained in us, so that we can handle whatever it is that is coming for our church...”

I am of the conviction that Jesus builds the church... but that the VERY BEST THING that we can do in our efforts to represent Him, is to get a people together, who first and foremost LOVE JESUS... and secondly, really just love their city and love one another and actually WANT to be together and learn from each other...

we aren't going to be the coolest... hippest place in town. But we want to be a place where a person can come to, and be KNOWN. and that is the type of energy that I believe will spread, and will change a city.

So most of what we have been talking about has not so much been about “selling vision” as much as it has been “showing value.” They are all “CO VALUES” because WE VALUE PEOPLE...

Today is probably going to be the most difficult of all the values to go over... my prayer is that I can make this simple and not confusing... that you would leave here feeling empowered... but not feeling like you have a license to sin because that is not the point of it, at all. But we are talking today about CONVERSATION.

We have to approach this the way that Paul does, when He says “My life is not my own...” because if you live as if your life is your own, and then you try and apply these principles, it can quickly become incredibly destructive.

This is one of the most important concepts we could possibly take on... and I hope that you are blessed by it.

In the days leading up to Jesus... one of the things that the rabbis would do, when they were trying to determine if a student were go to the next level in his study and potentially one day become a Rabbi... was they had a grueling test...

But it was not merely on the the knowledge that the student had, or of the scriptures that they could recite, though that was definitely a part of it, but the Rabbis cared a lot more about the types of questions that you asked *them*.

You had to “wow” the Rabbi by asking questions that kept the conversation about God going.

Because that was always the goal. To keep the conversation about God going.

This brings some clarity, or at least it should, to the moment we read about in Luke 2, when Jesus is still just a boy in the temple, Jesus’ parents accidentally leave him when they were heading home from the Passover Feast in Jerusalem... and they look for him for three days until they finally find him in the temple (Luke 2:46-47) where it says that Jesus was amazing everyone with both the questions he was asking, as well as the answers he himself was able to respond with.

I think that most people can agree, that life is about the journey more than the destination. The destination certainly matters, but in general, we spend so much time focusing on where we are going that we forget to live our lives on the way... but the majority of our lives are spent journeying... so learning to enjoy the journey is extremely important...

and it is like that with everything...

Conversation means that we care about the journey. We care about how we end up where we end up, and we want to get there together.

One of the reasons that we do EQUIP is so that we can have those conversations about God and the scriptures, in a moderately guided environment... we can face difficult questions TOGETHER, in an

environment where we can hold each other accountable to how we define or break down something.

Dawn and I also are going to restart our Sunday evening coffee nights, starting tonight from 6-7:30... that is another chance to have more conversations, without necessarily having an agenda... with us and others.

so what we are going to do this morning, is we are going to look first at a passage that we have looked at before, it is one of those staple passages, then a little later in the message we will move ahead a couple of chapters to when Jesus essentially says the same thing, but to a broader group... in both instances Jesus is talking to the disciples, but in this first one he is so inspired by Peter's response to his question, that he turns his attention to him.

So lets open our Bibles to Matthew 16:13-20

Matthew 16:13-20

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist, others say Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "**But who do you say that I am?**" Simon Peter replied, "**You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.**" And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and **on this rock I will build my church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and **whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.**"

Let's Pray

Let's use the passage in Matthew 16 in a two-fold way this morning... first, I want us to approach the passage in a way that shows YOU how EVERYTHING is a conversation... and then we will actually look at the significance to what Jesus says to Peter in the later part of Matthew 16, and then to all of the disciples in Matthew 18 about BINDING AND

LOOSING things on earth and in Heaven, and what it really means for us now... and the church as a whole, no matter where you live, or where you go to church, now.

So it is going to be a bit of a test subject for us.

Matthew 16 is one of the most debated passages in the entire Bible. The Catholic Church bases their entire structure on this passage, saying that Peter is the rock, the pillar, the head and LEADER of the church... and they believe that is what Jesus established here... when he said:

you are Peter, and **on this rock I will build my church**

that Peter is in charge.

They established Him as their “first pope” - and their belief is that here, Jesus was saying that Peter is supposed to be in charge of EVERYTHING. So all of the Pope’s that followed, of course, stepped into that same role... Leader over the entire church.

Protestants don’t necessarily believe that, though most would agree that Peter took charge of things, at least at first, after Jesus’ death...

So what I want us to do is to think about this passage... I want us to look for clues as to what Jesus may have meant, just based on the passage itself...

Jesus asks the disciples... who do people say that I am?

and they answer Him.

Then He asks the disciples... who do YOU say that I am?

and Peter steps out... he says something that HAD NEVER BEEN SAID before. He says: **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”**

Peter uses his lips to confess that Jesus Christ, who is a man, among them in the flesh, is also fully God.

Throughout time there has been lots of people who have said that “Jesus is amazing... he just wasn’t actually God’s son...” and there have even been others, strangely enough, who have said “Jesus is God... but he wasn’t actually a man... he didn’t come in the flesh” - that was why John wrote the letter of 1 John... to warn against teachers who said that Jesus did NOT come in the flesh... but here, Peter is the first person to ever speak that Jesus Christ, who is there before them in the flesh, is the Son of the living God.

Romans 10:9 says “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Peter made THAT confession there that day.

and Jesus said to him “on this rock, I will build my church.”

So the way that I read that, and interpret that passage, is I believe that Jesus is saying to Peter that BY HIS CONFESSION of Christ’s DEITY, he is the first person in the church...

Now, where I don’t expect all of you to do all of the ground work and research to try and figure out all of that, you always should study yourself... You should give the scriptures a chance to speak into your life.

we all need to constantly be in the word of God, studying it, meditating on it... committing it to our hearts and figuring out what it means for our lives... we are told to ALWAYS be prepared to give an account for the HOPE that is in us... (1 Peter 3:15) so understanding is VERY IMPORTANT.

and this may surprise you to hear me say... but there may some times be times when me, Dawn, or ANYONE else here may say something that you are not sure you agree with, today may be one of those days... we are part of this species of imperfect creatures called HUMAN...

and in some of those instances perhaps we may have misspoken, in other instances YOU may not have an understanding of it... and in other instances WE MAY BE JUST PLAIN WRONG.

And that is why we value conversations. Because as a community of people dedicated to being life long learners, we understand that we are imperfect people who serve a perfect God, trying to navigate an inspired book that has been translated from languages not spoken in our society.

So to think that any one person will get it 100% right 100% of the time is an illusion.

Even Peter, who actually gave Jesus the answer he was looking for to the question of “who do you say that I am?” in other instances said some really dumb things that didn’t line up with what Jesus had taught them at all.

In fact, in the exact same chapter, Matthew 16, JUST A FEW VERSES AFTER JESUS SAID TO PETER “on this rock I will build my church” - Jesus is talking about the future, and how he would die and then be raised from the dead, and Peter said to Jesus “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.”

and Jesus looks at Peter, the same Peter who he just told that he was the first brick in the temple of the living God... and he said “Get BEHIND ME SATAN... you are NOT setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.”

He had to be corrected, but it didn’t prevent him from being the one who lead the church into Pentecost in Acts 2.... it didn’t prevent him from being the one who was used to see thousands come to Jesus in one day...

And truthfully, it is not even always about getting things right, or getting things wrong... like a few weeks ago, I talked about the beard of Aaron, and we were talking about community and after service Jake came up to me and talked about the passage we studied... and he was so excited to share because even though what I said wasn’t *wrong*, I don’t think... he wanted to show me how there is EVEN MORE... and I told him, “always do that! Because I make notes when people talk to me about this stuff, and then I go home, and I weigh what was said... and I check sources and see if I can verify it... and then in the future, if we talk about that passage again

which most likely WE WILL, suddenly there is even more significant material that we can present to people, and in a new and applicable way.”

Dawn and I were having lunch with Pastor Kevin and Renee in Lansing a while back, and I asked Pastor Kevin “how long do you usually spend preparing a sermon?” - because I am really trying to add more balance to my life and make sure that I am doing the best job I possibly can, while creating space for all of the things that God has called me to do, which is a lot more than just writing and teaching sermons...

I was looking for “20 hours, 30 hours” - whatever the typical average number was...

but instead he said this to me, and I will never forget it. He said:

“Jacob, every sermon takes a lifetime to write...”

and its so true... if you don't live... you can't teach... if you don't journey, there is nothing worth sharing... information rarely translates into transformation if there is not an experience to back it up.

And that is why I take so seriously every time that I stand before you all and teach the Bible, no matter who is in the crowd... because it is coupled with a lifetime of learning.... it is coupled with a lifetime of experiences, and every time I have to be careful that I am speaking in such a way that understands “you have had your own experiences... you have learned things in your own life, and those things that you have learned may shape the words we are studying in a different way than my experiences did.”

Now, we study, because the truth is in the text. Knowing it, identifying with it, and understanding it is the only way that we can actually couple it with our own experiences and bring it to life in our own contexts... So experience is NO SUBSTITUTE for the Word of God... but it definitely helps it come alive.

Peter's experience with the living God shaped the way that he responded to Jesus' question, and because of it, he is the first BRICK, which many many others would soon be laid upon, to form the temple of the living God.

It was less about “who is in charge” and it was more about the fact that someone FINALLY got it right. His confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of the living God made him the first member of the church.

now, Peter certainly STEPPED UP as a leader and lead the church, but if you need more evidence to show that Jesus was not just saying “Peter from here on, you are in charge...” it can be argued that even during the church of Acts, he wasn't ALWAYS the head decision maker...

for example, there is this moment in Acts 15 when we hear about a council in Jerusalem... a board of decision makers in the church, and on that council is Peter... the same Peter who Jesus said “on this rock I will build my church” as well as Paul, who wrote the majority of the BOOKS of the New Testament... and then James, Jesus little brother who wasn't even a disciple while Jesus was alive... and do you know who most people believe was in charge of that important council?

James.

James spoke with authority unlike anyone else there, and just about any scholar or historian will tell you, in this council, James is in charge.

And what the council did was also incredibly important, and will actually shed a lot of light on the rest of what Jesus said to Peter... the council gathered to set the standards for what a Gentile would have to do to be a part of the church...

A Gentile was anyone who was NOT Jewish... and the conclusion had been made that the gospel was for everyone... but Jews followed certain practices that Gentiles did not, and so they met to decide: What will we require of the Gentiles? Did they have to become “Jews” - be circumcised like the Jews, and follow the laws of the Jews, if they were to become Christians?

Or was being a Christian something different entirely? Something that a Jew could be... and a Gentile, as they are, could be?

Which takes us back to Matthew 16.

The second half of what happens in this moment between Peter and Jesus both answers a lot of questions about how we structure things in our church, and for a lot of people, raises a lot of questions.

And I am going to say this up front... we are talking about Core Values... and what we are saying is something that EVERY church does whether they are forthcoming about it or not... and it IS biblical, but it, like so many other things, can be manipulated, which is why we are open about it and are so incredibly careful with it.

Jesus tells Peter that he is the first brick in the temple... the Rock that he will build the church on, and then he says this:

“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*”

despite popular belief among pentecostals... binding and loosing, as Jesus describes it, does not have anything to do with casting out demons or binding the devil. There are ways to bind the devil from your life... and most of them have to do with WHAT YOU ALLOW into your life, so to that degree alone will you find it related to that stuff, if you open yourself up to demonic activity... do not be surprised when it makes a home in your heart... but in a specific way, that is NOT what Jesus is talking about here.

When Jesus talks about binding and loosing, He was using language everyone would have been familiar with. He is referring to the way that certain rabbis were given the authority to bind and loose things over peoples lives who were under them.

It actually refers to the gray areas.

Certain rabbis had the authority to teach the word, and others had the authority to judge, and with *that* authority came the authority to bind and loose.

Those Rabbi's had something that was known as "their yoke" - and what it was, was their interpretation, on what the Torah looked like in *their* community.

This was called "binding and loosing." What was bound was *forbidden*. What was loosed was *allowed*.

This didn't mean that they re-wrote scripture. The scripture is never changing. The answers that *are* in there are the final words on the subjects. BUT NOT ALL OF THE ANSWERS ARE IN THEIR, and some of what is, is open to interpretation and a variety of applications.

For example... like when the ten commandments said: remember the sabbath and keep it Holy...

the question then became, WHAT CAN I DO on the sabbath day?

In New York there are these elevators built for certain practicing Jews... who are still to this day extremely strict about the sabbath commandment... and on the sabbath day the elevators are programmed to stop at every single floor automatically...

because some Jews are under the conviction that they can't do anything on the sabbath, including pushing a button on an elevator. So they can just walk into the elevator when it finally gets to their floor, and then floor by floor they sit in the elevator, as long as it takes, until they get to the floor that their apartment is on.

usually right next to it is a normal elevator that skips the floors you don't want to stop in, if you are merely willing to push one button.

In the New Testament, we get similar questions about the sabbath, like in Luke 13... "can I untie my ox or donkey from its stall and lead it out to get water?"

And of course, Rabbi Jesus self proclaimed that he has a yoke that is easy, so he said: WHO WOULDN'T UNTIE THEIR OX AND LEAD THEM TO

GET WATER? Jesus had no problem healing someone on the Sabbath day, because people are always his bottom line...

But others weren't so light.. some rabbi's yoke said "you can do absolutely nothing." and others held a more loose interpretations.

That is called a yoke. An interpretation of the degree to which that commandment applies to their community.

But here is the kicker...

whichever Rabbi you sat under, by their yoke, you were bound.

Now, I hope that it is obvious that if something they say just goes against the word of God, obviously they are the ones in sin... not you. And you should not be a part of something like that... Sometimes people in authority abuse that chair and need to be removed.

but what this means is that because you have placed yourself under authority, which everyone is supposed to do, you are additionally bound to that authority as long as it does not go against the bible, and so suddenly you could have a burden placed on you that you now are obligated to carry out, and if not, you are the one who is wrong.

For example, our denomination binds over its pastors that we are not allowed to drink alcohol... so even if when I read the scriptures, I feel that there was room for having some wine with my meal... because I have placed myself under their authority, I am bound to not drink at all. I willingly placed myself under an authority that bound something over my life.

and we believe that that is bound in Heaven!

BECAUSE OF THAT, and because of how seriously we take this passage... here at Courage, we are very careful what is bound and loosed over people.

and when it is done, we try and do a majority of it via conversation.

It is not a hierarchy in which one person sets the rules and everybody is locked into those rules... and quite frankly, that is the model that we get in the church of Acts.

In that same chapter where we see that James is leading the council, you get a window into the brains of these pillars of the faith, and how they handled conflicts, and how they set rules... and what they did may surprise you.

Again, they are trying to figure out: What do we require of the Gentile Believers?

One thing that is said continuously in their conversation when trying to figure out how to handle the situation were these words:

“it seemed good”

A phrase that lacks certainty yet carries authority.

They say it in Acts 15:22, again in verse 25, and then this one... this verse sheds SO MUCH LIGHT on the heart behind today's message: - Acts 15:28 - this is the result of the meeting... this is what they bound and loosed:

“For it has **seemed good** to the Holy Spirit and to us **to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements**: that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.”

and so the leadership of the church came together and basically said “lets not make the church a place of bondage” when Jesus himself said “MY YOKE IS EASY” - “MY BURDEN IS LIGHT”

So the leaders in the church of Acts determined “lets keep this simple... abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, from blood and what has been strangled... and stay away from sexual immorality... if you do that, YOU ARE GOOD.

yet so many churches today, if you even want to be a part at all, make you sign something saying that you won't drink, you won't smoke, you won't listen to secular music or even go a movie theater...

and because so many have adopted THAT model over the years, the church became FAMOUS for all of the things that it IS AGAINST... and what we are ACTUALLY FOR, and about, gets lost in a sea of rules.

Biblically speaking... the church is not here to police peoples morality... or to keep people handcuffed to us to make sure that they never do anything wrong...

the church is here to show the world the love of Jesus. and to EQUIP THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF THE MINISTRY.

If all of our time is spent policing, then there will be no time for equipping.

So, we are EXTREMELY careful about what kind of covenants and different types of things that we ask people to sign here at our church. We are not against those types of things entirely because there is power in commitment, but we are very careful to make sure that we are not binding people to a bunch more rules that are not even in the Bible, especially when they don't actually make sense for their life.

We talked about commitment when we talked about community...

it is very important that we cultivate a culture here where people are TOTALLY COMMITTED TO THE BODY... to one another, without having to take oaths that heap upon themselves burdens that they aren't meant to carry. Jesus has a lot to say about oaths... he warns strongly against them, and for good reason.

and if the day comes where we do layout membership guidelines... I pray that we would do so in a way that is reflective of the church of Acts... not putting a single burden on people beyond that which has been made absolutely clear, black and white in the bible.

Especially when you are dealing with people who all come from different places, with different histories... expecting everyone to look like you and act like you when the reality is that they are NOT you... it is just a frustrating waste of time that won't bare any fruit. IT IS SO MUCH BETTER to find the common ground, than to lay new burdens on them that are not necessary in *their* life, and *their* walk with the Lord..

If we aren't careful, we can put people in more bondage by our yoke than even the bible requires of them.

So here is how it is goes... Jesus... the Bible... that is the final word... but under that, the church binds and looses certain things based on their cultures and contexts... which here at Courage we handle through conversations... and then beyond that, YOU ALSO have been given the ability to bind and loose things, in your own life, with certain guidelines, which we will look at now...

Look ahead two chapters later, to Matthew 18:15-20 (still Jesus talking)

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. Again **I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.**”

now, we could certainly have a whole conversation about what Jesus meant by “let him be to you as a Gentile or Tax Collector” - maybe we can do a post on the website but I can't get into it right now.

but you notice that after saying all of that, once again... Jesus gives them all, not just the pope... but ALL OF THEM - the authority to bind and to loose and he says “whatever you bind is BOUND!!!”

He says this much more broadly... he talks to all of us... and he tells us “its not just for the Rabbis anymore!” and what is so significant about this is that Jesus both EMPOWERS US and TRUSTS US to do this.

So it is NOT something to take lightly.

Here is one reason why we as “the church” are very careful what we bind and loose, if its not directly in the scriptures... BUT WHY YOU, IN YOUR OWN LIFE... must exercise the practice of binding things and loosing things in your own life and family...

There are plenty of areas in your life, where you know your history. You know your family. You know the consequences you have faced and the challenges you have faced, and you need to bind some things in your life and commit that they will NOT be a part of you even though for others it may be ok. And you need to say, “others may, but I may not.”

Because yes, we have a moral standard that we all have to live by and it tells us right and it tells us wrong and it is called the bible.

but you also have another moral standard beyond the bible and it helps you navigate circumstances and navigate right and wrong and it is called your conscience and it is guided by the Holy Spirit.

and some times your conscience may be clear about something that someone else’s conscience is heavy about.

and for you it may be okay and for them it may be wrong.

or vice versa.

We did a workshop here last Tuesday about addiction... and the point was made... “if someone was at one point an addict, that person may be sent into a relapse by something as simple as a prescription from a doctor...” - so they encourage former addicts to always tell their doctors... “hey, I have struggled with this in the past, please be mindful of that with whatever you give me.”

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 6 says that just because something may be lawful, it doesn't make it helpful... but his determination is that in all things he does, HE WILL NOT BE DOMINATED BY ANYTHING...

and for some people, you know going in, even accepting a prescription is dangerous because that little pill has the potential to DOMINATE YOU.

But that is something that I would never need to tell my doctor, because I don't have that history... so it wouldn't make sense to bind that over me because that is not in line with my history, my habits or my desires...

so we don't put heavy burdens on people when their conscience does not match our's, but the way that they follow the bible still does.

KNOWING THE WORD IS SO IMPORTANT, Because the more it becomes ingrained IN YOU, the more naturally your decisions will start to look LIKE IT. if you have a heart like Jesus, it is very likely that the things you allow into your life will line up with the way that they would have been written, had they been in the bible in the first place. Just because something is not specifically mentioned, doesn't mean it is right, or wrong. THE BIBLE IS A NARRATIVE that sets a tone for a new way of living... a better way of living.

Jeremiah 31:33 tells us to write the word on our hearts... and when it is in there... the right things become so much more clear.

But something else is very important as well...

notice the last thing that Jesus says... and this is SO IMPORTANT... because if you try to practice this WITHOUT this last part... then you may leave here thinking that you have a license to sin, and that you can and do anything that you want as long as you can reconcile it with your conscious, AND THAT IS WRONG. You can't do that. That is not what it is saying.

even when Jesus gives us all this ability, he still says to do it through conversation... he says when there are two who ask... or three who are

gathered... HE IS THERE. He is saying, "yes, you know your history... but binding and loosing without accountability can be disastrous" -

For example, you may say: My Father was an alcoholic... His Father was an alcoholic... I was an alcoholic for 10 years but am five years sober now... I think that I will loose having a beer over my life... and if you are all alone, you may convince yourself that that is okay...

but the moment you speak that in community... the moment you bounce that off of someone else, you may say that to me... and maybe it is just common sense kicking in... or maybe a Holy Spirit check... something doesn't seem right with that... I can lovingly communicate that check that I get... Or you may say something, and you don't realize that the BIBLE DOES ADDRESS IT, but I happen to know that it does... I can point you there, and we can work it out, together.

but WHEN we agree, together... Jesus says it will be done.

Dawn is doing her masters program, and I want to read you something out of one of the books she read for class... this resonates so well with what we are trying to communicate... the book is called "How to think theologically" by Howard Stone and James Duke. And this is more about theology... some of the stuff we talked about at the beginning, where we actually try and understand "what is this actually saying, and how does it apply to me?"

I think it sums this whole concept up so beautifully.

(page 120)

"Theological reflection is insufficient if it is done in isolation. Theological reflection occurs in the context of community. Because it is communal, it is also collaborative and dialogical. Even though we eventually come up with our own unique operational theology, its formation occurs in testing, sharing, talking, and listening to others."

it goes on to say:

“Theology is an individual task and a corporate enterprise. Christians, as theologians, need to move beyond analysis and framing interpretations; we must make JUDGEMENTS and be prepared to tell others why those judgements are warranted. Knowing why we believe what we believe allows us to enter into conversation with other Christians.”

“The community of faith is not only a community of worship and fellowship; it is also one of critical deliberative theological inquiry. We offer support to others, but we also offer our insights about the faith. We listen to theirs...

Theological conversation occurs...

We decide.”

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Here, at Courage Church: we ALWAYS bind guilt... and condemnation. and people holding things against other people. That is not something that we will tolerate here. And if you think about it, WE HAVE TO. Because it can be easy to become judgmental about what other people are doing, if it doesn't match the boundaries that you have set for your own life.

And we can't always help what YOUR own conscience does to you, but we bind other people from placing those types of burdens on your life.

But we loose accountability. and balancing life to the Word of God and applying your own convictions to the gray areas of your life... as long as its done in community.

We loose conversations that keep us talking about God... we loose the asking of questions that we don't always have the answer too, because we are more concerned with whether or not you are journeying.

But this is something that must be taken seriously...

Just like an oath. When you make one, you are bound to keep it.

And the reason I am telling you all of this is because I am trying to show you the power that we have in the heavenly realm. Binding and loosing and making oaths all move heaven and hell in the same way, and they all have the same type of affects on a Christian community.

but Jesus is not telling us to not ever commit to anyone. He is saying be careful what you commit too. Be careful what dotted lines you sign your name on. But you must commit. Commitment is important. Because community is important, and he brought us together for a reason...

You shouldn't need a piece of paper to tell you **that you are committed** to *something*... and IF YOU DO... then you probably AREN'T.

But at Courage... We are committed to each other.

And at courage church, **conversation** means that we bind and we loose *together*, we learn *together*, we serve *together*, and we grow *together*.

We welcome each other's perspectives, and we depend on each other's accountability.

and I want to end by sharing with you a quote that I very much believe sums up the way that our church handles the issue of binding and loosing.

I don't know who originally said this... most say Augustine... during our time on staff at Angelus Temple in Los Angeles, we learned that Aimee Semple McPherson used this quote a lot.. but what it says is this:

in essentials... unity...
in non essentials... liberty...
in all things... charity.

in other words... some things are so important, that we have to be unified... on the exact same page... but there aren't as many of those things as you would think...

Peter's confession... what made him the rock... the first brick... THAT is an essential. (what he said, not how we interpret it and structure our churches)

Jesus Christ is the Son of the Living God, who lived a perfect life, and died a brutal death... FOR YOUR SINS AND MINE. Then after three days, he rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

That is essential. Even to Paul, that was always the main thing... (1 Cor. 2:2) He said "I resolved to know NOTHING except Jesus Christ and Him crucified."

but his model for everything else seems to be the best approach for us... Paul says elsewhere: "all things are lawful, but I will stick to doing what is HELPFUL.... And in anything I partake in, IT WILL NOT have dominion over me."

so in grey areas... areas that are NOT absolutely clear in the scriptures...

and areas that are NOT destructive to a community... we give people *liberty* to bind and loose those things in their lives, with the support and council of their communities...

but in all things... we bless one another. We bless those who Jesus puts in our pathway of the road we call life. We entertain strangers and entertain angels. Because to be honest... I believe that even if we spend entire days talking about God, and we don't get it all right... yet our lives still reflect Him so much that a non Christian could come to know Jesus by the reflection that is our life... then I think we are winning.

but what matters MOST for the sake of the gospel, is NOT that every ounce of our theology be perfect because nobodies is... BUT THAT OUR LIVES WOULD POINT OTHERS TO JESUS.

so in all things, charity.