

## **“Comfort Or the Cross”**

**1 Corinthians 1:18-30** For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. 19 For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.” (Isaiah 29:14)

20 Where are the wise? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? 21 For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know Him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. 22 Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, 23 but we preach Christ crucified; a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

26 Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before Him. 30 It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Which would you choose a Tempur-Pedic mattress or an old style box-spring? Would you rather wear your favorite pair of tennis shoes or some wooden clogs? Would you rather spend a weekend at a spa or a weekend camping in the desert at the hottest time of the year? Would you rather sit in a lazyboy or an old wooden table chair? For the majority of us these are easy choices right?

What is the common denominator though? That’s right ...comfort! All told, our society places a pretty high value on comfort. There is a lot of money to be made on products that enhance people’s comfort. Memory foam for your bed, Lazy-boys for your living room, body pillows, snuggies, and we even found a way to turn steel into wool for the kitchen.

On top of that, there are TV shows that exploit our love of comfort. How many of you have heard of the show Dirty Jobs? It’s a show that goes around and documents some of the world’s filthiest, most uncomfortable jobs. And we sit back on our

cushioned chairs and couches, laughing or wincing, all the while, grateful that we don't have to work that job.

But there's a danger in loving comfort too much and I don't just mean a few extra pounds and the health risk that goes along with that. See, it seems that AS we have continued to put more and more emphasis on being comfortable, our faith has followed suit. We have become Christians accustomed to comfort. We come to our buildings that are warm in the winter, padded pews, many churches have air conditioning for the Summer. Even our Bibles are mostly soft. Before we know it, it's not just the seats that are padded. The messages are padded with easy teaching. The doctrine gets watered down and eventually the message of the Messiah gets boiled down to the feel-good "love wins." Nobody goes to Hell, nobody dies in sin, there are no consequences! God is love, let's all join in a big, sloppy, hug!

What about Luke 9:23? Jesus says, QUOTE "If anyone would come after me, he or she, must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow Him." Does that sound comfortable to you? Some of you may be wondering why I am preaching this sermon about choosing to be a committed Christ-follower versus just being a "fan" of Jesus. It is not because I think that Doster Church is filled with people who are NOT committed to being good Christians. I am preaching to myself as much as anyone. The problem is, that we are too comfortable, all of us. We don't really have an idea what it is like to be persecuted or to have to sacrifice to be Christians. So what do comfort-craving American Christians, or casual fans, do with the cross? I mean, it's near impossible to avoid the cross and be a Christian right? Well, I am afraid that the Big-C church has tried to find a way to somehow soften the cross. We have actually found a way to create a comfortable way to think of taking up our cross. So the phrase, "We all have our crosses to bear" gets thrown around loosely, referring to even the most menial or everyday tasks and inconveniences. "Yeah I have an eye twitch that won't go away, but I guess that's just my cross to bear," or "I'm still going to school, I haven't decided what I want to be when I grow up...I guess that's just my cross to bear." Or how about something like, "my hair just won't stay the way I want it, I guess it's just my cross to bear." Now that might be a little bit of an exaggeration, but you get my drift. We make, picking up our cross daily, palatable somehow and we completely forget the "deny yourself" part. And the cross gets pushed back to the back of our sermons and Bible Studies, only making its annual appearance at Easter. Many churches have no cross at the front of the church anywhere. Even though it's on our churches, our t-shirts, and around our necks at the end of a necklace or cord, we end up with a "comfortable" cross. Mine is made out of nails to remind me that the cross has nothing to do with comfort. It also has some prickly barbs on it.

But the cross is a tough sell. It's bad enough that Jesus had to die on the cross, but why did He have to go and insist we all end up with our own crosses? Isn't that kind of ruining Christianity's hope for reaching every person? Doesn't that make for difficult public relations? Doesn't the cross hinder our ability to recruit new people? You are supposed to put your best foot forward, right? And don't we want all people to come to Jesus? We want people not to just come to church, but to come to Jesus. That is supposed to be the point, Isn't it? We want more people to come to Jesus, so we try our best to make Christianity sound as appealing as possible? At first blush that sounds good doesn't it? But what have we sacrificed in return? I do not believe that God has called us to be comfortable. Show me where it is in here?

In 1 Corinthians chapter 1 Paul talks about how the world sees the cross—in verse 18 He writes, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to those who are being saved it is the power of God.”

For the people living in the first century, the time that Jesus lived, the cross was the ultimate symbol of weakness and torture. Crucifixion was the ultimate torture weapon and the Romans used it to quell rebellions and reminded all that the Romans were superior in every way. That's why the message of the gospel—that God came to earth in the form of man and was crucified—is complete foolishness. It doesn't make sense. It is not logical. I mean, why would God use a symbol of torture, death, and weakness to save the world? I suppose the idea of the cross seems more appealing to us because it is no longer used to execute people like it was back then. Some people assume that it is not used at all anymore. The Voice of the Martyrs magazine tells us that people are still being crucified. People are actually still doing that to other people in some places. I heard that somebody was crucified in Egypt and Isis and Boko Haram are crucifying people. But, here in America, we are used to seeing the cross as an ornament, decoration, or piece of jewelry. Madonna was quoted as saying she wore a crucifix because it had a mostly naked man on it. But if a first century Jew came in and saw an illuminated cross hanging from our walls—they would think we were really sick people. Imagine people walking around with a guillotine hanging around the neck or an electric chair dangling from their ears. For the Jews the cross meant weakness! Pain!, and death!

And I think that is exactly God's point! That's what makes the cross so beautiful. God takes what, from a human perspective, is foolish and a symbol of weakness...He chooses what has no glory and carries no honor and says, “I'll use that.” God takes the least likely symbol for love and life possible ... and uses that. He takes what the world says is foolish, demeaning, and shameful and says, “Watch this” and turns it into the **power of salvation!!**

1 Corinthians 1:18 says that God turns the foolishness of the cross into the power of salvation. Look down at verse 22: “Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but **we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles** ... for the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and **the weakness of God is stronger than any human strength.**”

Who else but God could take a cross that represented defeat—**and turn it into a symbol of victory?** Who else but God could take a cross that represented guilt—**and turn it into the symbol for grace?** Who else but God could take a cross that represented weakness, domination, and condemnation—**and turn it into a symbol of freedom?** Who else but God could take a cross that represented pain and suffering—**and turn it into a symbol of healing and hope?** Who else but God could take a cross that represented death—**and turn it into a symbol of life?** That’s right, NO ONE but God! What seems like the ultimate moment of God’s weakness was in reality, the ultimate moment of God’s strength. And here is why that matters. Here is what I don’t want you to miss! This is the main point for the day... **What God Did for the Cross, He Can Do for You!**

When you are the weakest—you are exactly where you need to be for God to be the strongest. The upside down truth of the cross is that when you are weak—then you are strong because God is strong in you, **in** your weakness. Look at verse 27... “But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong.” It’s not that God used the cross in spite of weakness—He chose the cross because of its weakness. Throughout the Bible God continually chooses the weak over the strong. Here are some examples: Abraham was very old, Jacob was a conniver and insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was humiliated, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was proud, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and had the woman’s husband killed, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was disobedient, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was uneducated, impulsive and hot tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular and selfish with money, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was not courageous. The Bible is a long list of imperfect misfits who discovered that weakness is strength. **What is impossible with man is possible for God!**

Though it seems backward to us, God teaches us that when we think we’re strong, we are really weak—but when we acknowledge our weakness and humble ourselves before the Lord we put ourselves in a position to receive HIS strength. Paul talks more about this truth in his second letter to the Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians chapter 12 and

verses 9-10, it says, “I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses ... for when I am weak, then I am strong.” Meaning when I am weak, God is strong. But I don’t know anyone who naturally delights in their own weakness do you? In fact, most of us go to great lengths to hide or disguise our weaknesses. Like when you’re on a job interview and they ask the dreaded question, “What is your greatest weakness?” How do you answer that? Well, I tell you what the experts say. They tell you NOT to tell them your weakness, because if you do, they won’t hire you. They tell you to come up with a weakness that sounds more like a strength like I can be a bit of a perfectionist or I tend to be a workaholic. Why do we do that? Because, in our world, in our economy—weakness isn’t strength, strength is strength. There are 2000 plus self-help books published every year ...that communicate one message—you can do it yourself. You have what it takes. Look deep and find the strength within yourself. But Paul says strength comes when we realize our weakness. Something doesn’t add up! So when we ask are you a fan or a follower we are in effect asking are you going to do things the world’s way or God’s way. What is going to be the ultimate decision maker in your life? The Bible or your society and the expectations of the world around you.

One of the things that our world tries to fit us into is a bunch of rules. Just like the Pharisees, Sadducees, and the religious rulers of Jesus’ day we tend to rely on the rules. In John chapter 8 we read about Jesus being confronted by an angry mob that bursts onto the scene. This mob is made up of religious leaders who have this woman with them, perhaps dressed in not much more than a bed sheet and she is shoved to the dirt on the ground in front of Jesus. One of the religious leaders gives the accusation to Jesus by saying, “We caught this woman in bed with a man that was not her husband. The Law says we stone her. What do you say?” You see, these religious rulers were trying to use the rules, to trap Jesus. Rules can do that to us; turn us into an angry mob of sorts. We might not form together and parade a sinner around town, but we’ll huddle in a circle and talk about someone who is not living up to our standards.

It is important to understand that God’s Word, provides both guidance and commandments. And those commandments, those laws are here to protect us. If we follow God’s guidelines we will have a full and meaningful life. But if we are honest, none of us can follow the laws and commandments found in this book perfectly. Every single one of us has fallen short, some of us in more public settings and others in more private ones. But when we overemphasize the rules, we can get people thinking that we’ve got it all figured out. We can get people thinking that it’s following the rules that saves us, not the blood of Jesus. Rules can get heavy. Jesus gets mad at the religious leaders because they are weighing people down with so many rules that people got

exhausted trying to keep all the rules. Now remember, most of these rules were good rules, it was only the last hundred or so that were ridiculous. The Jewish religious leaders had turned the ten commandments into over 350 rules. It's not that the rules are bad, it is bad when we start to think that following the rules make us Christians or saves us. It is not about rules it is about a personal **relationship with Jesus Christ!**

The woman in John chapter 8 is looking down—humiliated, guilty, and ashamed. She's been caught breaking the rules and the rules say, she loses her life. Jesus kneels down and He begins to write something in the dirt. We don't know what He wrote, it doesn't say. But the religious leaders are waiting for an answer. They know they've caught Jesus by surprise and they are ready to hear Him submit to the letter of the law, or be labeled a lawbreaker. They are waiting for Him to shrug His shoulders and say, "Well, those are the rules," OR be labeled as against the Jewish laws and therefore NOT the messiah. Finally, Jesus looks up at these leaders and says, "If any of you is without sin, he should be the one to cast the first stone." And one by one, some commentators speculate it begins with the oldest, the spiritual leaders drop their stones and walk away. Then Jesus looks at the woman and asks, "Is there no one left to condemn you?" The obvious answer is NO. So Jesus says with tenderness, "Neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin." Jesus does not say, it's okay, I accept you as you are, you can't help it that you like men, go and be comfortable. NO! He says, "leave your life of sin." Why does the church think it has to try to change that?

Ever heard of the professor who built up and harped on how important the final test would be. He told everyone it would be difficult and everyone studied like crazy. On the day of the test the professor gave explicit instructions to read through the entire test BEFORE you began to answer any questions. There were sighs and moans and groans as people realized that there were things on the test they didn't know. But in small print at the end of the test were the instructions: You can try and get an A by taking this test OR you can just put your name on it and you will automatically receive an A for reading the instructions carefully. Everyone but three or four people signed their names and turned in their test and walked out. The 3 or 4 never did figure it out until later that they tried and tried for no reason. One of them got upset that she had spent so much time studying that she wasn't going to take any handouts so she took the test anyway, yeah that'll teach him. And so it is with many casual fans, they keep trying to do it on their own. And the grace of Jesus, that same grace that saved a woman from being stoned, calls to those who have been hauling around a long list of rules and obligations. Jesus calls to those you who are tired of pretending to be more than you are. He calls to those who have had the guilt and fear of religion wear them down and He says, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest."

When I got married to Amy there were some rules that I said I would live by—some are written and some unwritten. But I understood that when I said, “I do” that I would 1) be faithful to her as long as we both shall live and I am going to be hers alone. 2) I would provide for her and do my best to meet her needs and 3) I am committed to her for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health until death parts us. There are other rules that were never written down but I have come to understand throughout the years: 1) I am to limit my piles of papers, magazines, and clothes. 2) I am to help around the house. 3) I am not to expect her to be happy early in the morning. You get the picture. If I saw my relationship to Amy as a bunch of rules I had to keep, I wouldn’t be very happy. But because I love my wife I find joy in being a good husband. I would do anything for her so picking up once in awhile, taking out the garbage, putting the lid down and other extravagant acts of sacrifice are a joy—most of the time.

In the end, the grace and the love of God frees us and inspires us to live for Him. When you love God, you want to please God. But your priority, your emphasis, your focus has to be on loving God. It has to be about the relationship with Jesus, not the rules, or it won’t work. You simply will not be fulfilled if you focus on the rules.

If our children grow up and they define Christianity as keeping a moral code or a bunch of rules instead of defining Christianity as being a fully devoted follower of Jesus Christ, odds are that they will walk away from Christianity. Yes, they need to understand the guidelines that we call commandments. But if they grow up thinking that Christianity is all about the rules they are very likely to walk away from Jesus and the rules. It is absolutely vital and essential that we define Christianity as following Jesus Christ and loving Him and being loved by Him as part of a personal relationship. We have to be absolutely clear that our religion is about a relationship to Jesus first and foremost. The rules won’t keep anyone around. A personal relationship with Jesus Christ and seeing and getting to know people that do their best to devote themselves to following Him in every way will keep people around. If we are big on the rules we will always be small. That’s why I believe that one of the things that should be important is to try to remove all the barriers we can, without compromising the Word, Call, and Love found in the Word of God to people coming to worship. We reach out to people that are hurting. We reach out to all who need hope.

People have told me that my transparency makes them uncomfortable. They think that I admit my weakness in front of others too quickly. But I want to admit my weakness. I want to ask God to show His strength in my life. To do for me what He did for the cross. It’s only pride that wants to carry my own load and refuse to admit my weakness. But the cross makes it clear that when I am weak, He is strong! There was a time in my life that I struggled with pride. I had a tendency to brag. So it is important

for me to be aware of my weakness, my brokenness, so I don't depend on myself. This last season of life reminded me of that very clearly! We are called to depend on God.

Will you trust God enough to let your weakness be His strength? Because its when we let go of our need for comfort, our need to be in control, our need to glory in our strengths or accomplishments or our paycheck, or our trophies, or our co-workers' approval that we begin to have impact on others. What is it that keeps you from abandoning the comfortable version of the cross? What prevents you from being thankful for what God does in our lives what He accomplished in Christ's death. It's then that God does in our hearts what He did for the cross. He transformed something ugly, something representing weakness, death, torture ...and made it beautiful—a sign of salvation, forgiveness, and resurrection. When we let go, it's then that He takes followers who were hanging by a thread and bolsters their spirits. He takes followers who were at their weakest moment and uses it for enormous kingdom good. He takes followers who were all but defeated and He turns their testimonies into life-giving messages of truth and hope, all to His glory. We can impact others and encourage others with our testimony. Tell the stories of how God is working in your life. We are not really a family if we can't strengthen one another with encouragement.

Take a look at your life. If you find yourself living like someone who knows about Jesus, someone who know the stats and the facts BUT doesn't know Jesus personally make the change. I know all of Jordan Love's stats as the Quarterback for the Green Bay Packers, but I don't really know him. If you find yourself knowing a bunch of stats about Jesus but not personally by the power of the Holy Spirit, make a change! Doster Church will have an impact on our community for the Kingdom of God only when we turn away from comfort and turn toward living our lives as fully committed, devoted followers of Jesus Christ. If you want to pray about it or ask questions Elders will be up front after church.

Let's pray ... Lord, do for us what you did for the Cross. Do for us what you did for the cross. Do for me, do for this church, do for this community, Plainwell and Delton and Doster, do for this nation, do for this world what you did for the Cross, that we might begin to understand why you chose such an uncomfortable means of self-sacrifice. Transform us, renew us, mold us, and make us into completely committed, fully devoted Christ followers. Teach us your ways. Show us what it looks like to be a fully devoted Christ-follower. Lord we are weak. Be our strength. We ask these things in the precious and wonderful name of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. AMEN

**“Comfort or the Cross”** Sermon given at Doster Community Reformed Church  
August 26, 2018

Sermon Notes:

- I. Our Society Loves Comfort
- II. Does Luke 9:23 Sound Comfortable to you?
- III. We Try to Find a Way to Make the Cross ...Easier.
- IV. The Cross is Foolishness – God Transforms it into Something Wonderful
- V. God Can Do That for You –He Will Turn Your Weakness into Strength
- VI. It’s Not About the Rules
- VII. Rules Don’t Inspire Grace
- VIII. Rules Don’t Keep Us Around
- IX. Admit Your Weakness-Accept God’s Invitation
- X. Let God Turn Your Weakness Into Strength

**Sermon Notes for “Comfort Or the Cross”**  
**based on 1 Corinthians 1:18-30**  
**Given at Doster Community Church October 18, 2026**

- I. Our society places a fairly high value on “comfort.” The word “comfortable” is not in the Bible. God, angels, and brothers and sisters in Christ give comfort. Any time someone in the Bible gets complacent trouble is soon to follow.
- II. What does it mean to “deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus?”
- III. God took a symbol of weakness, something ugly and tortuous, and made it beautiful. Now people wear them as jewelry. God turns it into the power of salvation, a symbol of victory.
- IV. What God did for the Cross, He can do for you! When you are the weakest you are strongest IN CHRIST!
- V. God’s Word provides both guidance and commandments. The laws are there to PROTECT us! But it is not about rules, but rather a personal relationship with Jesus.
- VI. The grace and love of God frees us and inspires us to live for Him.
- VII. Trust God enough to let your weakness be His strength! Let go of your body’s crave for comfort, let go ... and let God! Choose the cross, choose to let God be your strength and live like a fully devoted follower of Christ!