

High School Sunday School Lesson

The Substance of Freedom: Avoiding Counterfeit Christianity

Bible Passage: Colossians 2:16–23

Main Truth: Jesus wants a relationship with us—not just religious activity. Real freedom is found in Christ, not in following man-made rules.

Lesson Length: 45–60 Minutes

Lesson Goal

Students will learn to recognize the difference between authentic faith in Jesus and "counterfeit Christianity"—a faith based on appearances, rules, or performance instead of a relationship with Christ.

Opening Activity (5-7 Minutes)

Icebreaker: "Real or Fake?"

Ask students:

- Have you ever bought or received something that looked real but turned out to be fake?
- What gave it away?
- Were you disappointed?

Transition:

Counterfeit shoes, jerseys, and designer bags may only cost us money, but counterfeit Christianity can cost us something much more valuable—our relationship with Jesus. Today Paul warns believers not to settle for a fake version of faith.

Introduction

Ask:

If someone looked at your life, would they know you're a Christian because you follow rules...or because you love Jesus?

Many people think Christianity is about:

- Don't do this.
- Don't listen to that.
- Don't wear that.
- Go to church.
- Read your Bible.

While some of these things can be good, **none of them save us.**

Christianity is about **knowing Jesus.**

Paul wrote Colossians because false teachers were convincing Christians they needed Jesus **plus** extra rules to be truly spiritual.

Paul's response?

Jesus is enough.

Read the Scripture

Read **Colossians 2:16-23** together.

Encourage different students to read a few verses each.

Lesson Point 1

Counterfeit Christianity Looks Good—but Isn't Real

(Colossians 2:16-17)

Paul says not to let anyone judge them over food, festivals, or religious days.

Those things pointed people toward Jesus.

Once Jesus came, the shadow wasn't the focus anymore.

Illustration

Imagine someone shows you the shadow of your best friend.

Would you hug the shadow?

No—you'd hug the real person.

The shadow only matters because it points to the real thing.

Jesus is the substance.

Rules are only shadows.

Discussion

- What are some ways teenagers can confuse "being good" with actually knowing Jesus?
 - Can someone attend church every week and still not have a relationship with Christ? Why?
 - Why do you think people like rules more than relationships?
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Lesson Point 2

Don't Build Your Faith on Appearances

(Colossians 2:18-19)

The false teachers wanted people to think they were extra spiritual.

They talked about visions.

They bragged about special experiences.

They wanted attention.

Paul says they had disconnected themselves from Jesus—the Head.

Ask:

What are some ways people try to "look spiritual" today?

Possible answers:

- Posting Bible verses online but living differently at school
- Acting differently around church friends
- Pretending to have everything together
- Looking down on people who struggle
- Thinking church attendance equals spiritual maturity

Key Truth

God isn't impressed by appearances.

He wants our hearts.

1 Samuel 16:7

"People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Lesson Point 3

Jesus Gives Freedom, Not More Rules

(Colossians 2:20-22)

Paul asks:

Why live like you're still trapped by rules if Jesus has already set you free?

Some people believed:

- Don't touch.
- Don't taste.
- Don't handle.

These weren't God's commands.

They were human rules pretending to be God's commands.

Discussion

What are some "church rules" people sometimes think are in the Bible—but actually aren't?

Examples:

- Christians can't wear certain clothes.
- Christians must listen only to one style of music.
- Real Christians never struggle with doubt.
- Christians have to look a certain way.

Discuss carefully:

Some convictions are personal.

Some commands are biblical.

We need to know the difference.

Lesson Point 4

Rules Can't Change Your Heart

(Colossians 2:23)

Paul says these rules:

- Look wise
- Look spiritual
- Look disciplined

But they have **no power** to change sinful hearts.

Only Jesus changes us.

Illustration

Imagine painting over a rusty bicycle.

It looks new.

But underneath it's still rusted.

Rules paint the outside.

Jesus transforms the inside.

Digging Deeper

Read Hebrews 4:9-11

Ask:

What does it mean that Jesus is our "Sabbath rest"?

Discuss:

Because Jesus finished the work of salvation, we don't have to earn God's love.

We obey because we're loved.

We don't obey so God will love us.

Read 2 Timothy 2:15

Ask:

How can knowing God's Word help us avoid counterfeit Christianity?

Talk about:

- Social media
- Podcasts
- YouTube
- Friends
- Culture

Everything should be compared with Scripture.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:13

Discuss:

God always provides a way out of temptation.

Sometimes we ignore the escape route because sin looks more attractive.

Real freedom isn't doing whatever we want.

Real freedom is having the power to choose what honors Christ.

Small Group Discussion (15 Minutes)

1. What stood out to you most from today's lesson?
 2. Is it easier to focus on rules or a relationship with Jesus? Why?
 3. Have you ever felt like you had to "perform" for God?
 4. What's one thing that can distract teenagers from truly following Christ?
 5. What does authentic worship look like Monday through Saturday—not just Sunday morning?
 6. If someone asked you, "What makes Christianity different from every other religion?" how would you answer?
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Personal Challenge

Ask students to silently reflect:

- Am I trying to impress people—or follow Jesus?
- Am I depending on church attendance more than time with Christ?
- Do I know Jesus personally?
- Is my faith real, or just something I've grown up around?

Give students one minute of silence.

This Week's Challenge

Choose ONE:

- Read Colossians Chapter 2 every day.
- Memorize Colossians 2:17:

"These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

- Spend ten uninterrupted minutes talking to God each day.
- Encourage one friend who may feel like they have to "earn" God's love.

Gospel Connection

The good news is that Jesus never asked us to earn our salvation.

He lived the perfect life we couldn't live.

He died for our sins.

He rose again.

When we trust Him, we're forgiven—not because we're good enough, but because He is.

Christianity isn't about becoming impressive.

It's about becoming connected to Christ.

Key Takeaway

Counterfeit Christianity says, "Follow these rules and maybe God will accept you."

The Gospel says, "Jesus has accepted you through His grace. Now follow Him."

Real freedom isn't found in religion.

Real freedom is found in **Jesus**.

Closing Prayer

"Lord, thank You that You never asked us to earn Your love. Help us to stop trusting in appearances, rules, or religious activity and instead trust completely in Jesus. Show us where our faith has become about performance instead of relationship. Help us walk in the freedom You

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purchased for us through the cross. May our lives reflect authentic faith that points others to You. In Jesus' name, Amen."

This version is designed for **high school students (grades 9–12)** with shorter teaching segments, relatable illustrations, interactive discussion, and clear Gospel application while staying faithful to the message of Colossians 2.