



# Truth in Advertising

To be fair, we know what we ought to be like, and so we try to describe ourselves that way with plenty of good intentions of living up to it.

There are many ways we Christians like to advertise our churches. Underneath the rhetoric, however, things often look a little different from the lofty terms we use to describe ourselves. Here are a few examples that might look familiar.

We stand on God's law. [Caution—This phrase can mean: Jesus taught us to forgive those who sin against us, but we get a bigger kick out of beating others over the head with the law. Better not let the church find out about one of your sins, or you'll find out what we mean.]

We are a Bible-believing church. [Caution—This phrase can mean: We use the Bible to control people's lives and keep them under our thumb. We oppose serious scholarship; the Bible means whatever we say the Bible means. If the King James Version was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us.]

We are a Spirit-filled Community. [Caution—This phrase can mean: We are a three-ring circus. We act any crazy way that strikes us spiritual at the time and say the Holy Spirit is behind it. The Spirit loves to make people look like fools—haven't you heard?]

We believe in strong families. [Caution—This phrase can mean: Problem families are not welcome. If you want to stay, make sure you are good at pretending everything is OK at home.]

We believe in salvation by grace through faith. [Caution—This phrase can mean: For those who follow our rules, that is. Grace is for the righteous and hell is for the sinners. If we find out you've been sinning, you'll wish we hadn't.]

We are committed to young people. [Caution—This phrase can mean: As long as they don't screw up. If they do, we'll drop kick them out of here. We don't want bad influences hanging around our kids.]

What if we dumped the rhetoric and admitted we're just a collection of sinners who have found that God loves us? Here's an ad I'd like to see a church place in a local newspaper:

Would You Like to Try Our Church?  
*Don't come to our church if you think it's better than all the others. It isn't. It's just a church. It will let you down. It might even break your heart. But know this: You're welcome here. We're all sinners. Every one of us. If you're a sinner too, you'll be right at home.*

*Sometimes we are judgmental. Sometimes we stick our self-righteous noses in each other's business. Sometimes we gossip about each other and spread nasty rumors. Sometimes we're insensitive, sometimes we're too busy for each other and sometimes we're downright obnoxious.*

*Sometimes we fight over doctrine. Sometimes we fight over money. Sometimes we just fight.*

*So why come to our church?*

*Because in spite of us, Christ is here. He loves us in spite of ourselves. He's making us into something good, even though we don't see much of it. Sometimes his love shines through us. Sometimes we are kind, caring and supportive of one another. Sometimes we make a positive difference in people's lives in our city. And Christ would do those things through us even more often, except that we are usually too selfish to let it happen. We are sinners who are learning to trust in Christ to forgive us and help us love others better. If you're a sinner too, you'd fit in here. So why not drop by?*

*Our Slogan: Thank God he is Merciful—Even to This Bunch!*

The church today lives in a world of advertising, so we advertise. Trouble is, when the church gets into advertising, it tends to use the same tricks all advertisers use: Depict the competition's products as bad and yours as good. Don't mention the problems with your product. Exaggerate any perceived good qualities of your product. Promise great satisfaction—whether you can deliver it or not.

To be fair, we know what we ought to be like, and so we try to describe ourselves that way with plenty of good intentions of living up to it. The problem is, we never seem to be able to actually be the way we describe ourselves.

Maybe part of the problem is that we are advertising the church instead of advertising the gospel. Does the average sinner need to know what a good church we think we have, or do they need to know that God loves them? Maybe they need to know that they can trust God to give them a new life in Jesus Christ. Maybe we don't need to convince them what a good church we have—only what a good God they have. □

—J. Michael Feazell