

Topics in Social Science--Freshman Religion--First Semester

“Developing a Christian World View”

Unit One Developing Critical Readers/Reading Images and Advertisements

Lesson 04 “The Message Behind the Advertisement”

Name:

Hour:

“Whether they’re drinking soda, driving cars, or mopping floors, most people in advertisements have one thing in common: They’re smiling. Often, the advertisement lists all the reasons we should buy a product (“This car gets the best gas mileage in its class. Its safety rating is unbeatable.”). At the same time, the beautiful, contented-looking models in the ad silently create another message: “Look at us. We’re happy. If you buy this car, you’ll be happy too.”

You should be using the same careful eye to examine ads as you did the surfer earlier this unit. Why? Advertisers are constantly trying to sell you something. Each company wants us to believe its product is the best. When people have lots of choices, many of them fairly similar, a company must make people believe they need (or at least really want) that company’s product. If a company can’t get enough customers, it’ll go out of business. The company must make its product stand out.

That’s why it’s important to look at the **tactics** advertisers use to influence you to buy products. An ad is an image with a message. Some messages are printed right on the page. Imagine a toothpaste ad. Emblazoned across the top of the page is this motto: “Blinding White toothpaste will brighten your smile!”

1. Below are two pictures, choose which one you would use for an ad campaign.

a.



b.



2. Why did you pick the ad that you picked?

Perhaps the lady in picture “a.” is covering up yellow teeth and is embarrassed to show her smile. In picture “b.” the lady is smiling with white teeth and laughing. Which picture would you rather be like? What message would you get from the pictures? If you said something like, “People will like you better if you whiten your teeth with Blinding White toothpaste,” you understand the advertisement’s **implicit** message.

Targeting emotions can be particularly effective with tweens and teens. When trying to sell to kids your age, advertisers often focus on worries you already have. They want to make you think you need their product to fix a particular problem--yellow teeth, acne, bad breath, and so on. Ads can make you feel even more insecure about your “flaws” if you buy into their messages.

Ads often focus on outward appearances and the things we own. It is easy to get caught up in the desire to look great and have the latest phone, mp3 player, or other gadget. In general the message of advertising is, “We can fix you. We can give you a great life. Buying stuff is fun, and it will make you happy.”

If you are not carefully “reading” the ads that come your way, you’re more likely to let their hidden messages influence your worldview. Everyone has a worldview. The beliefs that determine how you look at and live your life make your worldview. As Christians, we need to remember that we don’t belong to this world (see [John 15:9](#)). We belong to Christ. Our joy and fulfillment come through Him, not through products we purchase. Believing in Christ gives meaning to our lives; products and advertisements want you to believe in their product’s power to improve your life. But in the real world those products are powerless. Christ and Christ alone is the real power for life and living!

The Professor’s Office:

Pictures, words, advertisements all have the power to make you feel. They can make you feel happy or sad, thirsty or hungry. Most importantly, they can make you feel like you need what they are selling. You need the grape-flavored drink in the ad to be stronger or you need to try that sandwich with five different types of cheeses and purple ketchup to be happy.

Everywhere you go and look, advertisers are speaking to you through their messages. When you made a (picture) list of brand names and logos in your house, how many did you find? Which ones did you find? In your home--when you wake up, open your refrigerator, or go into the kitchen--advertisers are speaking to you and your family through these messages.

Knowing this is important. The people making these advertisements don’t want you to think. They only want you to listen to and learn from them. Why think when you can watch television and listen to advertisements that tell you how to live? Why think when you can read a magazine in a comfortable chair and see what you need to live a happy life?

If you listen to advertisements, you will learn how a pair jeans can make you happy, what food will make you stronger; what toothpaste will make your teeth whiter, and what computer will make you look smarter. Advertisements tell you what an ideal world could look like.

I once had a student who bought a bottle of water because advertisers claimed the water came from a tropical island in the South Pacific. This "Island" water came in a bottle that had a beautiful picture of paradise with palm trees, a shining sun, and a bright blue waterfall. My student told me the water tasted better than other bottled waters because it came from this beautiful place. In fact, my student wouldn't drink any other water--nothing tasted as good as her "Island" water.

Let's think about that. My student believed this water was ideal because the bottled implied or said it came from a beautiful waterfall on an island in the South Pacific. I had to test this student's belief.

First, I found five colored cups. In a yellow cup, I poured "Island" water. In blue, red, and green cups I poured other bottled waters. In the orange cup, I poured tap water from the kitchen sink. My student did not know which waters was in each cup. This is called a blind taste test. She took a drink from all of the cups and then ranked them in terms of taste. Which water do you think she thought was best or worst?

She chose the water in the green cup--another bottled water--as best tasting. Her second best tasting water was tap water from the kitchen! The "Island" water in the yellow cup came in fourth. My student even said the water in the yellow cup tasted "dirty".

What do we learn from this? Advertisers' messages and images can be very powerful. The images they use can make us believe in and want what they are selling. You and I need to read advertisements very carefully and realize they are making promises or presenting ideas that may not be true.

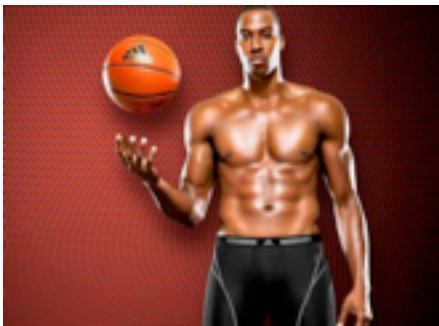
Now something to do:

I. Choose one of the ads pictured below.

a.



b.



c.



d.



e.



2. Write a two-to-three-sentence description of the ad in the text box below.

Type to enter text

3. What is the ad selling?

4. What is the stated message of the ad?

5. Look carefully at the picture. What is its unspoken or **implicit** message?
6. What tactics does the ad use to persuade you to buy the product?
7. Do you like this advertisement? Why or why not?
8. In this advertisement, do you think the stated or unstated message is more likely to persuade people to buy the product? (In other words, which message is stronger?) Why?"

(Write with the World, God's World Publications, 12 All Souls Crescent, Asheville, NC)