

## Left-handed Smoke Shifter

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Everyone loves to lead others on a wild goose chase. Did you ever have to bow before the great king and chant “O-wah – tagu – Siam”? And remember the snipe hunts that we used to have as kids? There was nothing like getting a naïve soul to wait in the darkness holding an open paper bag waiting for their “friends” to drive the snipes into their area. Eventually the smarter ones would realize that they were being taken for a ride and wander on back in. There was pure joy in the camp watching the neophytes gain a level of wisdom.

Nowadays the tricks are a little different, but the principle is the same. Now the kids take the new guys out “spider-sniffing”. I’ve never actually been, but I know that it is about the same thing as snipe hunting. One of the activities for new boys in the Scout troop that I have been helping lately is to be sent out to other troops at a camporee asking for a “left-handed smoke shifter”. The tenderfoot, not knowing any better, wanders around asking everyone they see if they can borrow one. Most everyone else is in on the joke; those that aren’t in on it couldn’t help anyway!

Well, you probably think that this was kind of mean. And isn’t a Scout supposed to be “trustworthy?” I guess people don’t think that the rules apply when you’re joking with someone. People somehow enjoy seeing people getting off track.

I see a parallel to this in the church. We seem to spend a good deal of time looking for things which ultimately have no meaning. We all know of topics of discussion that just seem to mire us down in the mud. They expend our energy, generate hostility between our members, and end up accomplishing absolutely nothing. We could give many examples of this, but I’m sure we would generate the very problem I am trying to solve. We need to try our best to avoid getting side-tracked from the fundamental message that Christ died to give.

I can just see Satan grinning as he sends another church out in search of a “left-handed smoke shifter.” But we ought to know better than fall for it.

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