

## Is it just a smokescreen?



I love watching movies and documentaries about World War I and World War II. It never ceases to amaze me what those soldiers went through and the eternal gratitude we should have for their unselfish sacrifice.

A classic scene from many of those video productions is the setting of soldiers moving about against the backdrop of a smokescreen. That's where the phrase "smokescreen" derives from. It is a military term depicting a wall of smoke intended to mask the movement of troops and artillery. Smokescreens were a key element in the success of many

individual battles.

Most of us don't have to worry about military smokescreens in our everyday lives, but we do deal with another type of smokescreen.

For example, when you talk to someone who brings up an argument while not really looking for an answer, or if a reasonable answer wouldn't make any difference, we call that a "smokescreen."

You most likely have experienced this numerous times. I'll bet you've even used smokescreens yourself! I'm sure I have. It's been years, but smokescreens came in handy when the case for whatever I was promoting was pretty weak. It can be a very effective technique... just not a good one!

Try this one on for size. You ask a skeptic if they would consider going to church, and they say, "Not a chance. The church is filled with hypocrites!" Let's think this through a bit deeper, using critical thinking skills. What do they mean by "the church"? It's not like there's only one church on the planet, and it has that issue. Secondly, you do not judge a belief system by people who violate its teachings! It is undoubtedly true that there are Christians who act hypocritically. That's not a knock against Christianity; that's a sad commentary regarding those individuals. The body of Christ needs to come alongside those individuals and gently encourage them to make whatever changes are appropriate to mature in their faith and be a better testimony to those around them.

Additionally, even if you found a church that in general wasn't struggling with hypocrisy, the skeptic very often still wouldn't want to go. That means the issue of hypocrisy is just a "smokescreen" being used to mask the larger issue of their rejection of Jesus Christ.

One caution here. It is very important to find out what the skeptic's experience with church has been. They may have had a horrific experience that is greatly influencing their skepticism, and we shouldn't ignore that. On a somewhat related note, I remember standing around on the playground in grade school, talking with a few classmates. Somehow the subject of church came up and they all stated "what they were." Methodist, Catholic, Episcopalian. I remember feeling very frustrated and uncomfortable because I didn't have a "label." I grew up in a non-denominational Bible church and wasn't aware of any particular label I should be using. That's another story for another time.

# Question of the Month

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I bring this up because I mentioned to my classmates that I went to church three times a week; Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. They all looked at me in horror and said, “You go three times a week? We would hate that! How can you stand it?” I actually really liked going to church. It was a great family event, I liked the pastor and his sermons, and I had a lot of friends there. For many of them, that was about the only time I would see them. What I didn’t realize was how different my classmates’ experiences were. Turns out, church for them was a very arduous event in an extremely sterile environment. Overall, it had virtually no meaning whatsoever, other than they were forced to go because their parents took them. They put in their time once a week, Sunday morning, for as short as possible, and then they were done for the week. They pictured me doing that three times a week! It’s no wonder they thought I was crazy.

I met a guy over 20 years ago at the health club where I was a member. He was a Harley-riding staunch atheist, and I was a Christian who felt if I ever did ride a Harley, I’d probably end up killing myself and quickly meet the God he didn’t believe in! He and I didn’t have much in common.

Despite our vast differences, we enjoyed just “shooting the breeze” while working out. He knew what I believed and made it very clear he “didn’t want to hear any of this God stuff.” I respected his wishes and never pushed but was always willing and able if he ever brought up the subject, which happened more often than not.

Years passed, the health club closed, he went his way, and I went mine. A few years ago, he joined the club where I am currently a member. I had not seen him in many years. He approached me and said (in his usual loud voice), “Hey preacher man, save anyone lately?” I smiled and said, “I’m working on it!” He razzes me a lot, and I enjoy it. It’s all good fun. He once again brought up the subject of God, so I jumped right in. At one point, I told him there is a great deal of very impressive evidence that the Bible is not just some “religious” book but is the inspired Word of God. I very briefly mentioned prophetic evidence. His response was, “Well, it all depends how you interpret it.” I quickly said, “You are absolutely right! It does depend on that. So how do you interpret it?” Crickets chirped for the first time since I met him. He was using a smokescreen that no doubt had served him well in the past, but I called him on it, and he was silent. I finished by telling him that I would pray for him, and he smiled broadly and said, as sincerely as could be, “Thank you!”

The general point I am making in this article is that skeptics often use arguments, not as a valid defense of their skepticism, but rather as a diversionary tactic. Way too often it is effective because the Christian is not as prepared to answer as they should be. Hopefully, this article will help you more effectively share and defend your faith, even with seasoned skeptics.

If you have any questions about this or any other issue, please don’t hesitate to [contact us!](#)