

Cross Current



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Magic, Tricks

His fellow magicians would like to make Val Valentino disappear.

In a series of wildly popular programs for Fox television, the California native lifted the curtain on 120 new and traditional magic tricks, performing them as *The Masked Magician* then revealing how each was done. *Magic's Biggest Secrets Finally Revealed* reportedly drew bigger numbers than the World Series. The videos are still on YouTube.

Though the audience was captivated, the tight-knit community of magicians was appalled, accusing Valentino of betrayal, greed and pure self-interest. Unrepentant, the illusionist maintains his revelations make magic less intimidating and will encourage a whole new generation of performers. He also argues the real value in a magic act is the showmanship of the illusionist, not the mystery of the illusion itself.

Regardless, the Masked Magician has dumped open his bag of tricks for all to see. Almost every one of magic's illusions is created with the help of deception, distraction and misdirection. Using everything from pretty girls to the proverbial smoke and mirrors, he cleverly keeps our attention away from where the real action is taking place. Though everything happens right in front of the audience, the most important bits are hidden by curtains and rigged contraptions. One look at the situation from every angle would instantly reveal the ruse.

In almost every case, the magician makes ample use of deceptive props, trap doors and hidden compartments. Those are the secrets behind levitating an assistant, the magician's vanishing act, and cutting a woman in two.



Altar Ego:
*who you become when
you live for God
sacrificially.*

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In the spiritual realm, another Masked Magician does his best to conjure up deceptive notions of independence, freedom and invincibility. Instead of wearing a black, sinister mask, this magician "disguises himself as an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14), intent on creating the illusion that absolute independence is a good thing; that faith is a crutch for the weak, and that true strength comes with being in control.

But the truth is, nobody is truly independent. Everyone relies on someone or something for support and there are hidden props in everyone's life, hidden behind our pride, vanity and fear of vulnerability. Likewise, what our culture calls freedom is anything but. Ads and social attitudes tell us freedom is the absence of responsibility, the avoidance of pain and unpleasantness, and living without rules or any kind of accountability. What we might *buy* is more important than what we might *be*. True freedom supposedly comes with money, popularity and power so, in a culture where success is based on *appearances*, it's no wonder we resort to *disappearances* periodically.

Sometimes the trap door is emotional withdrawal that shows in the shallowness of our relationships. Sometimes it's an obsession that lets us hide from the realities of life — shopping or sleeping, perhaps — or a downright addiction to drugs, drinking, food, sex, TV, or anything else we use to escape from emotional pain or numbness. The problem with our vanishing act is that our problems are still waiting when we crawl out of hiding. Call it freedom but a ruse by any other name is still a ruse.

Magic, tricks. It deceives. It distorts. If we rise above the crowd and the eye candy to look at things from a God's-eye perspective, we'll see the deception immediately. We'll see a life of lies and illusion in which we seldom consider the sad effects of sin and self-centeredness. Why? The world's magic keeps us under control with subtle misdirection; secret compartments of the soul; sleight of heart, not just sleight of hand; and a wide variety of props that resemble the truly important things of life but merely allow us to hide or escape.

On the other hand, a life fully committed to God brings joy and genuineness, spiritual poise, purpose and peace of mind, and a place in the Lord's family. It all comes down to choice. The magician will perform his tricks right before your eyes. But with God, the trick is to be right before *his* eyes. Remember the con in conjuring.