

# PLAIN TRUTH®

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION®

## LET'S MAKE A DEAL®

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### The Art of the Deal

Striking a bargain or making a deal is one of the most fundamental activities in which human beings engage. In many areas of the world, if you shop in an open-air market, the sellers expect some bargaining. If you walk up to a shop or stall in such a market and merely pay the posted price, you take all the fun out of the transaction.

In many cultures, people with something to sell expect and enjoy bargaining. They assume everyone enjoys haggling.

When we, mere mortals, assume that since we like making deals, God must react in a similar way, we make a huge mistake! **God doesn't make deals.**

A deal is predicated on both parties having something the other party desires and/or needs. **We have nothing to offer God that he does not already have.** No individual is ever equipped to make a deal with God.

Because God already owns everything there is, we mortals are incapable of bargaining with him. Some might assume we can make a deal with God if we do lots of good deeds and then, because he really wants to love us but will not unless we earn it, our "deal" will enable God to love us.

**NO!** Bargaining or making deals with God is not the nature of the relationship he offers you and me.

One of the first deliberate attempts on our part to contact God is when we desperately need something from him. When we get into real trouble from which there seems no way out, the first determined conversation some of us have with God is all about making a deal. We want God to listen to us when our back is against the wall—when we have nowhere else to go—so we offer him something in return.

"You give me what I want, God, and I will give you something in return. Something for something—let's make a deal, God!"

You might have tried to bargain with God when you became acquainted with the person you felt was the love of your life. You decided that this was the person you wanted to marry, so you prayed to God, telling him that if he would just use his influence on

your intended love and somehow cause them to like you the way you liked them, then in return you would do whatever God wanted you to do.

We attempt to bargain with God during life and death situations—a well-known example being the *fox-hole prayer* during a time of war—"God, if you'll just get me out of this alive, I'll do whatever you want me to do."

Perhaps you have found yourself in the middle of a nightmare—you or a loved one has been given a diagnosis of terminal cancer. The natural inclination is to ask God to cut us a deal, to count up all of our good deeds and consider what we have done for him.

One lady expressed it this way. During a terminal illness she was terribly disappointed with God for not healing her as she had asked... "especially after all I have done for him."

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There are many biblical examples of people attempting to bargain with God, but **these examples are not prescriptive**—they are merely examples of how people failed to comprehend the grace of our Lord.

The most well-known example of trying to make a deal with God is the time when Abraham tried to negotiate with God over the destruction of the city of Sodom (Genesis 18:16-33).

Abraham offered God a deal—he proposed that if he could find a certain number of righteous people in the city, then God would relent and save the entire city.

You know the story: Abraham kept on “working” God until he got him down to the lowest possible number.

Is this example of Abraham given to us in the Bible so that we will know how to make deals with God? No, it’s offered as an ironic and almost humorous example of how we humans often seriously misjudge God, thinking he is more like us than he actually is.

We can’t “work” God. We can’t fool him or trick him with our wheeling and dealing negotiations. God cannot be



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manipulated—and we should be deeply thankful he cannot be, shouldn’t we? Thank God that God is not at all like us.

There are biblical examples when God fulfilled requests of people who bargained with him, but it’s a huge mistake to think that God did so because of what the people promised to do for him.

Who do we take God for anyway? Do we really think that God needs any of the rubbish or junk we have had in our attic or garage for thirty years?

I mean, come on, do we really think we have anything to offer God that he desperately wants so he would be inclined to start bargaining with us?

### **Why God Doesn’t Bargain**

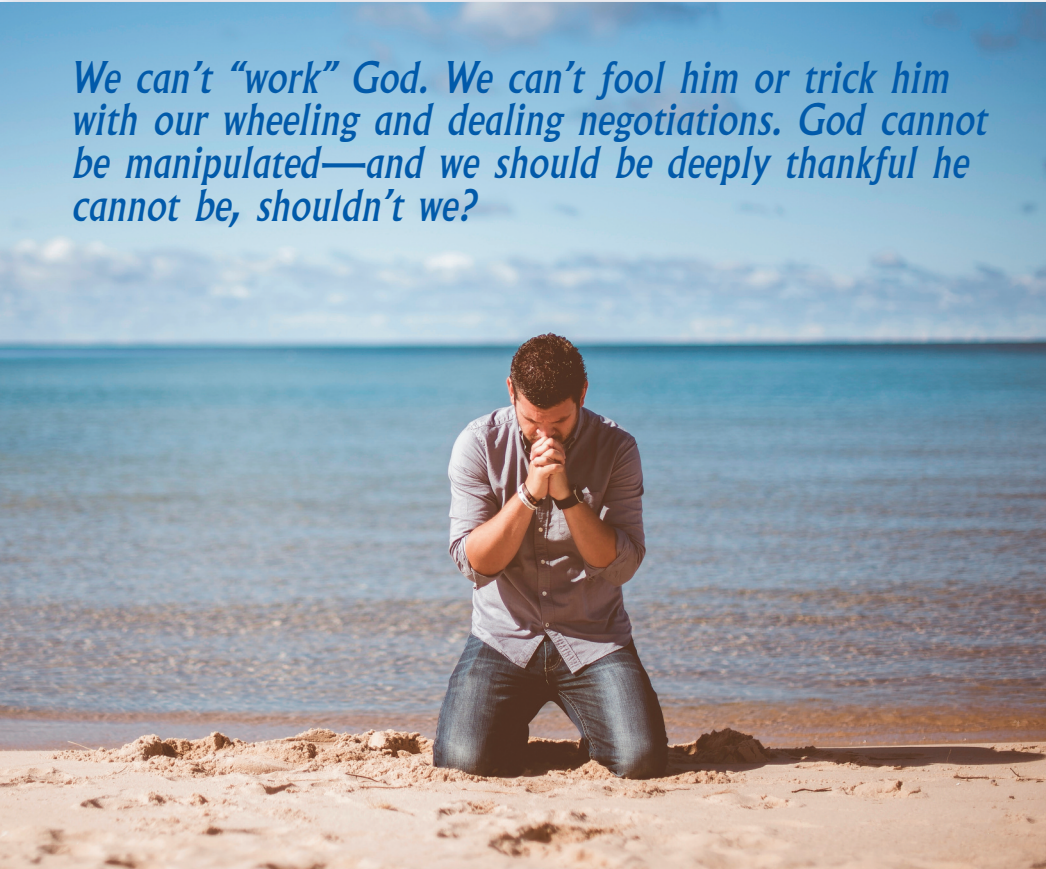
God’s grace is no bargain. God’s grace is a gift. God doesn’t do bargains. God doesn’t make deals, because we have nothing of value to offer him that he does not already have.

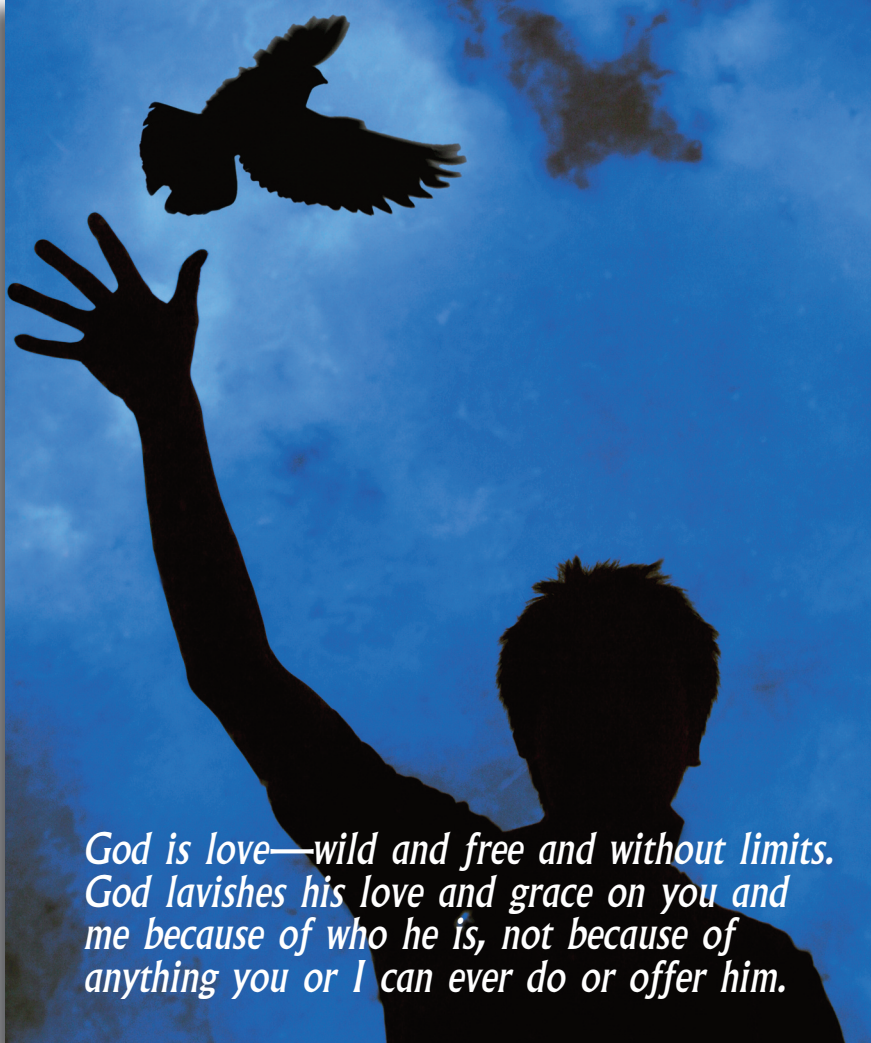
God doesn’t desire any material possession or any deed or work we can offer, but he does desire our trust and our love.

To help us understand the relationship he freely provides, apart from any “deal” we might offer, he reveals himself by his grace.

God is love—wild and free and without limits. God lavishes his love and grace on you and me because of who he is, not because of anything you and I can ever do or offer him.

**We can’t “work” God. We can’t fool him or trick him with our wheeling and dealing negotiations. God cannot be manipulated—and we should be deeply thankful he cannot be, shouldn’t we?**





*God is love—wild and free and without limits. God lavishes his love and grace on you and me because of who he is, not because of anything you or I can ever do or offer him.*

***If you want a bargain, then you want Christ-less, performance-based religion.***

Bargaining is what religion is all about. Religion is about making a bargain with God—you know the drill—we try to haggle and negotiate with God, and our prayer goes something like this:

“OK God, I will pray more, I will pay more, I will try harder, and I will do better. I will stop doing bad things.”

“Then, if and when I do, here’s your end of the deal God. If I do all this stuff for you, then I don’t expect to win the lottery, but in return for what I do for you, here’s the deal: you should make sure I don’t have any serious health problems, no tragic accidents to me or my family, no huge family dramas and no kids in trouble with the law.”

Christ-less religion teaches that the purpose of prayer is to change God’s mind and to get him to see it our way—to make a deal.

But one of the primary purposes of prayer is to change us. God doesn’t need to change.

**God doesn’t do bargains. God doesn’t do religion!**

Our relationship with God is all about God. Our relationship with God is offered to us on the basis of God’s goodness, not in any manner, shape or form on our goodness.

Our relationship with God is *faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone*. And that is such a deal! □

# Healing

**W**ords age. Just like people, as words get older, they also change. Just like some of us, word meanings begin to sag, develop new wrinkles and can lose touch with our rapidly shifting culture. Old definitions become tired and crusty in their twilight years. If we don’t pay attention, these aging words deteriorate.

Words, like people, that were once full of life, meaning and faith may atrophy and become crotchety and religious—best consigned to verbal retirement.

Biblical terms such as *sin*, *repentance* and *justification* have not aged well.

Religion imbued these storied terms with finger-wagging overtones until they became grumpy and legalistic. They wearied ears and hearts to the cringing point. It’s tempting to put them out to pasture for good.

This need not be. Like my many silver-haired friends, the ancient words used by Christ and his apostles contain libraries of beautiful wisdom. If we’re willing to listen and give them due care, we may even heal these weary words for fresh use.

## **“Sin”—Missing What Mark?**

We’re often told “sin” refers to “missing the mark” but then left to assume the bullseye is moralistic perfection. Rather, the goal or *telos* of human design and destiny is none other than a love union with the Trinity, with each other and with our world.

To sin (every kind of sin) is to misuse our God-given freedom and energies for selfishness. Sin is turning away from self-giving, other-welcoming love.

Inevitably, our forays into self-centeredness are