

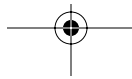
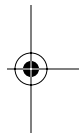
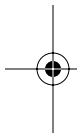


Introduction

A FORMER FACULTY COLLEAGUE ONCE TOLD ME, “Every day I come to work is a day closer to my next sabbatical.” He said it with a smile on his face, and he loves his work, so I interpreted his words as exuberance over sabbaticals more than cynicism about the daily life of college professors. And he is quite right—sabbaticals are an amazing privilege for those of us afforded the opportunity.

On my last sabbatical, my wife, Lisa, and I took our laptop computers and headed out to various places throughout the world to read, reflect and write. (Lisa is also an academic and was on sabbatical at the time.) My project was a general book, published in 2004 as *Why Sin Matters*. Despite the title, it was a book about grace as much as it was about sin. At the time, I thought of it as my most important book: what could be more important for the living of our fragile lives than an understanding of sin and grace? Though the book was reviewed favorably—and was named as a finalist for the 2005 Evangelical Christian Publishers Association’s Gold Medallion Award in the Theology/Doctrine category—the swirling winds of trade book sales are spurious and unpredictable. Before I knew it the book was languishing in the bookstores and destined to soon be out of print. Perhaps the orange cover looked too much like fire and brimstone.

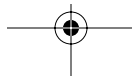
Though my brief misadventure into general book publishing taught me to stay in the more stable and predictable world of authoring academic books, I was not ready to give up on the topic of sin and grace. It seems terribly important for Christians to understand these doctrines and their implications for daily living. So several years later I have tried again, writing this book about sin and grace for Christian counselors, seminarians, psychology students, pastors and others with an interest in soul care. There are a few strategic passages adapted from *Why Sin Matters*, but for the most part, it is a fresh look at a topic I have been considering for several years now.





Somewhere along the journey of being raised evangelical, and then staying in the evangelical church as an adult, I picked up a view of sin and grace that was quite forensic in nature. That is, sin is a violation of God's moral will, and grace is God's decision to forgive our sins through the life and work of Jesus. I still hold to this view, but I am gaining new appreciation for the relational context of the Christian story. It's not that God comes up with arbitrary rules and then rewards or punishes us based on our compliance. Rather, God is relational, and created us to be relational. The tragedy of sin is the breaking of our relationships with God and one another. But God, whose character and purposes have always been relational, has redeemed and is redeeming us through the grace revealed in Jesus Christ. There is a forensic dimension to this, of course, but the power of God's love is the most remarkable part of the Christian narrative. In grace, God desires to sanctify us so that we become more and more like the only fully functioning human who ever lived. And as we become more like Jesus, our counseling cannot help but be transformed by the grace that brings such renewal and hope.

This book is an exploration of how Christian views of sin and grace relate to Christian counseling. In the first chapter I consider the gulf between biblical counselors and Christian psychologists, which is often expressed as a disagreement about how one should handle sin when working with clients. It seems to me that much of this disagreement reflects a misunderstanding of biblical counseling and the inseparability of the Christian doctrines of sin and grace. Chapter two is a look at sin from an Augustinian perspective. I argue that an Augustinian view of sin ought to be a source of empathy for Christian counselors because we are all in this mess together. The depth of God's grace (both common and special grace) is considered in chapter three. If counseling is a process of *discovery* and *recovery*, then grace is essential to help clients experience enough safety to explore the hidden places of their lives. Chapter four provides three vantage points for the importance of holding sin and grace together: psychology, theology and spirituality. The final four chapters of the book consider sin and grace from the perspective of *Integrative Psychotherapy*—a multidimensional approach to counseling that Clark Campbell and I recently described in another IVP Academic book. *Integrative Psychotherapy* posits three domains of intervention: functional, structural and relational. Each of these is related to a particular aspect of the image of God, so each of them also involves particular nuances for how we understand sin and grace in Christian counseling.





Introduction

Christian counselors have divided over the doctrines of sin and grace, which is both sad and unnecessary. I hope this small book will prompt us to look again at the central themes of the Christian faith and consider how doctrine informs the soul care we provide. How freeing a sound doctrine of sin can be, because it ushers us into the presence of a surprising grace that touches our deepest spiritual and psychological longings.

