

JOHN BRADSHAW PSYCHOLOGICAL "GURU" FOR THE NEW AGE

**"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."
Proverbs 14:12 and 16:25**

In the early 1990's, John Bradshaw enjoyed enormous popularity as his books climbed best seller lists and PBS featured him in 10-hour segments on numerous occasions. Since then, his name seems to have faded into oblivion. His books are still available at your local bookstore, but only one new book has been published since about 1992. Nevertheless, his ideas of "recovery" are alive and well, not only in the world, but also in the church.

ETERNAL TRUTH

Bradshaw denies that there are eternal laws, saying that "such a worldview has been refuted many times over." He teaches that we *should* not have "*shoulds*," recommending instead that you formulate "your own Ten Commandments." Even in the church, it is not unusual to hear contempt for sound doctrine. It is alleged that doctrinal concerns divide believers. "Christian psychologists" are more focused on being truthful about emotions than about biblical doctrines.

The Bible says that God's Word is eternal (Psalm 119:89, 160; 1 Peter 1:24-25).

MAN'S NATURE - ORIGINAL SIN

Bradshaw flatly denies the teaching of original sin, claiming it is "mythical." He sees young children, as well as "shame-based" adults as being "pre-moral," lacking moral capacity. He denies the Bible's teaching that man is born with evil and selfish inclinations because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Although the church may not blatantly deny the reality of sin, the modern psychological focus on self-esteem obscures the gravity of sin and encourages believers to "feel good" about themselves.

The Bible states that sin entered the world at the time of Adam, and through sin, death (Romans 5:12). Scripture confirms that man is conceived and born in a sinful condition (Psalm 51:5).

MAN'S BASIC PROBLEM

Bradshaw defines man's fundamental problem as "toxic shame," meaning a "rupture of the self with the self" or the "rejection of the self by the self," or the "loss of selfhood." Bradshaw's

"false belief system" is to say: "I am flawed and defective as a human being. I am a mistake. No one could love me as I am. I need something *outside* to be whole and OK." The church often echoes this perspective by emphasizing self-worth and claiming that Christ died for us because we are so worthwhile. Teachings about self-love and self-forgiveness are similar to Bradshaw's belief that man experiences a rupture within self.

The Bible teaches that man's fundamental problem is separation from *God (not self)* due to his sin. Man *is* "flawed and defective," and he *does* need "something outside," Jesus Christ, to be "OK," to be reconciled to God. Man's sin has separated him from God (Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 4:18), but Jesus Christ has rescued believers from the penalty and power of sin (Romans 7:24-25).

TRUE SELF...OR NEW SELF?

Bradshaw uses the term, "I AMness" and says that "my I AMness is like God's I AMness. When I truly AM, I am most like God." He urges you to discover this "I AMness," or "true self," "authentic self," "core godlikeness," "true meaning of perfection." The church sometimes misconstrues the image of God to mean that there is a "true self" buried underneath but damaged by the sins of others.

The Bible: Man is created in God's image (Genesis 1:27) but has fallen due to his sinful rebellion. God *alone* is the great "I AM" (Exodus 3:14, 15); that name is His and His alone. The Christian has a *new self* in Christ (Ephesians 4:22-24, Galatians 2:20, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

RECLAIMING SELF...OR BOUGHT AT A PRICE?

Bradshaw's book, *Homecoming*, is based on the concept of "reclaiming" self, one developmental stage at a time. "Championing your wounded child leads to recovering his spiritual power. With his newfound spiritual power, *your self-creation begins*" (emphasis added). "Christian" teachings about "codependency" frequently advocate a "reclaiming" of self rather than sacrificially loving God and others.

The Bible says that man has been redeemed, bought at a great price by the precious blood of Christ (1 Peter 1:18, 19; 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20). The Christian is a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), no longer to live for self for rather for the glory of God (2 Corinthians 5:15).

TRUST

Bradshaw: "When push comes to shove, I'll probably save my own ass first. But you can trust yourself." Bradshaw says to tell your "inner child" that "you are the only person he will never lose, and that you will never leave him." Writings of "Christian psychologists" often encourage readers to trust in their own feelings as well as "recovered" memories.

The Bible states that the person who trusts in self is a fool (Proverbs 28:26; Jeremiah 17:5-8). God says that *He* will "never leave you nor forsake you" (Joshua 1:5; Deuteronomy 31:16; Hebrews 13:5).

FORGIVENESS

Bradshaw's view of forgiveness is selfishly motivated and seen as an exercise where one "re-forms" the past and breaks ties with abusive parents. "Christian psychologists" often counsel people to forgive themselves, and to forgive others primarily in order to find relief for their own emotional pain.

The Bible: God says to *repent* of past sins, not "*re-form*" the past. He promises to remember our sins no more, not counting them against us, and He commands us to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other as God in Christ has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32).

DESIRES

Bradshaw counsels us to "reconnect" with our desires. He says that "the most damaged part of our wounded inner child is his will. The will is desire raised to the level of action. Desire flows from a connection with our needs." Teachings about "codependency," even among Christians, have a similar focus on the desires of self.

The Bible calls the Christian to "put off" the desires of the flesh (Ephesians 4:22-24), which are responsible for temptations to sin (James 1:14, 15), to crucify the passions of the flesh (Galatians 5:24). However, those who trust in Him are promised the desires of their hearts (Psalm 37:4).

SEXUAL STANDARDS

Bradshaw condones homosexuality and other sexual sin, having forsaken the standards of God's Word: "I will determine with whom I will be sexual. I have the right to determine how, when, and

where I will be sexual with another person. My only guideline is respect for my own and my partner's dignity." Christians may not openly advocate sexual immorality in this manner, but psychologists often explain away pornography, homosexuality, and other sinful sexual behavior as being caused by the sins of others in the past.

The Bible: God gives **no such right!** God's people are to be pure in their sexual behavior (1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Ephesians 5:3; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).

WORSHIP

Bradshaw encourages an outright *worship* of self, in place of God: "Anytime we make someone into a guru, we diminish ourselves. Tell your inner child that you will be their guru." Christian might not promote the actual worship of self, but the recurring "inner child" theme is one that encourages believers to "parent" this "inner child." In a subtle manner, self usurps the role of God as Father.

The Bible roots sin in wrongful worship; man exchanged the worship of God for the worship of created things (Romans 1:25).

MEDITATION

Bradshaw asks us to "meditate on nothingness," on "just being." His New Age meditations are characteristic of Hindu pantheism rather than Christianity. Although the church might not promote such empty "meditation," worship is sometimes emptied of content and replaced by emotion and experience.

The Bible says that the Christian is to consciously, deliberately meditate on the Word of God (Psalm 1:1-2, 119:97).

JESUS CHRIST

Bradshaw says that he likes to ask Jesus for favors, and he sees Him as "Godlike," but not once does he mention our Lord's death and resurrection, which is the central message of the gospel. In one of his later books, *Creating Love*, he flatly denies the deity of Christ: "I don't even believe that Jesus never sinned. I think that is *inhuman* mystification." Although Christians would affirm the deity and sinless nature of Christ, psychological "wisdom" encourages believers to see Jesus primarily in terms of meeting perceived emotional needs.

The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is God, and He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2). He is the exact representation of God's being, sustaining all of creation and providing purification for sins (Hebrews 1:3).

BEING VERSUS DOING

Bradshaw places heavy stress on "being" over "doing." He says: "Most of our wounded inner kids were taught that it was not OK to just BE--that we could matter and have significance only if we were DOING something." He admits that "homecoming" is a "secularized" version of the Christian concept of justification by faith.

The Bible says that salvation is the gift of God, not something that is earned by our own works (Ephesians 2:8-9). However, salvation is followed by works, which give evidence that faith is genuine (Ephesians 2:10; James 2:14-26).

CONCLUSION

Bradshaw laments that "you may go to your death never knowing who you are."

The Bible, in one sense, says yes: You may go to your death never knowing that you are a sinner in need of redemption. You may also go to your death never knowing who Jesus Christ is. Jesus said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6). Those who go to their death not knowing who He is and believing in Him are warned of eternal death because they remain in their sins (John 8:24).

Bradshaw's name may no longer be in the limelight, but his ideas emerge throughout the writings of "Christian psychologists." Teachings about self-esteem, the "inner child," the effects of a painful childhood, and "codependency" all contain striking similarities to Bradshaw's psychology. The entire "recovery movement" seems to be neatly packaged in his flawed theories. Reading a critique of his books will enable the believer to become more discerning about errors found throughout the writings of numerous "Christian psychologists."

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