

## **I. Introduction**

- A. What is alternative medicine? *Any therapy that is not accepted by the dominant medical establishment in a given culture.***
- B. Alternative medicine is booming.**
- C. Why are people turning to alternative medicine?**
  - 1. When conventional medicine doesn't work, people who are desperate for help will try almost anything. Mark 5:26**
  - 2. There are real problems with conventional medicine.**
  - 3. Alternative medicine is quick to confidently offer specific diagnoses and cures for chronic conditions which conventional medicine doesn't successfully treat.**
  - 4. People generally mistrust institutions: pharmaceutical industry, corporate medicine.**
  - 5. People are attracted to that which claims to be "natural".**
  - 6. People are attracted to ancient cures used by other cultures.**
  - 7. Postmodernism has made people much more relativistic.**
  - 8. People are attracted to holistic and "spiritual" approaches to health.**
  - 9. The baby-boomer generation is aging and they don't want to feel old.**
  - 10. Some alternative therapies seem to work.**
- D. People are also turning to alternative medicine for psychological/spiritual issues.**

## **II. A biblical perspective on health and sickness.**

- A. The human body is a wonderful creation of God. Ps. 139**
- B. Why do people get sick?**
  - 1. Health problems are the result of the fall. Ge. 3:16f Ro. 8:22-25**
  - 2. Some sickness is due to particular sin. I Co. 11:29-30 Dt. 28:15,21-22 Lev. 26:16 Num. 12:9-10 II Chron. 21:14-15 Ps. 32:3-5 Js. 5:14f Ex. 15:26**
  - 3. Not all sickness is due to a particular sin. Jo. 9:1-3 Ex. 4:11 Phil. 2:25 II Ti. 4:20**
  - 4. Some sickness may be due to demonic activity. Mt. 9:32 12:22**
- C. God is sovereign over your health. Ex. 4:11 Ps. 103:3 Deut. 32:39**
  - 1. He does not promise perfect health. We are told to expect suffering in this life.**
  - 2. Ultimately all healing is from God. We should turn to Him first.**
  - 3. He heals according to His sovereign will. Ps. 103:3**
  - 4. Sometimes He answers prayers for healing. Js. 5:11 II Ki. 20:5 Mt. 8:5f Is. 38:2f**
  - 5. But not always. Phil. 3:26-27 II Tim. 4:20 II Cor. 12:7f**
- D. There are spiritual issues related to your health.**
  - 1. Could this health problem be the direct result of sin? James 5:14f Ps. 32:3f**
  - 2. Could God be using this sickness to discipline and sanctify you? Ro. 5:3-5**
  - 3. Could it be that this ailment is simply for the glory of God?**
  - 4. Are you making health an idol? Mt. 16:26 22:36-40 I Co. 6:20**
  - 5. Are you seeking the Lord first? II Chron. 16:12-13 Mt. 6:33**
  - 6. Should you call for the Elders of your church to pray for you? James 5:14f**

7. The Bible forbids methods which seek supernatural help from sources other than the one true God. Dt. 18:9-11 I Cor. 10:6,11 Micah 5:12 Eph. 6:12
8. Human science can become an idol.
9. Some therapies forbid foods which God explicitly allows. Gen 1:29 9:3 Acts 10:9f
10. Godliness promotes good health. Pr. 17:22 10:27

E. You have important responsibilities when it comes to your health.

1. You have a responsibility to take good care of your body. I Cor. 6:19-20
2. You are responsible to be a good steward of your financial resources. Luke 16:11
3. You are responsible not to give bad counsel to others.

F. You are free to use legitimate medical means to deal with sickness. I Tim. 5:23

Mt. 9:12 Col. 4:14 Lev. 13:1f Jer. 8:22 Pr. 31:6 II Ki. 20:1-2 Luke 10:34 Re. 3:18

### III. What are some concerns about alternative medicine?

A. Many therapies are not proven effective. Whom do you trust? Pro. 14:15 *The naive believes anything, but the sensible man considers his steps.*

1. The world has long been plagued with “healers” who did more harm than good. Mark 5:26 Job 13:4 *She had endured much at the hands of many physicians & had spent all that she had and was not helped all, but rather had grown worse..*
2. Many treatments through history have been widely accepted, despite the lack of proven effectiveness.
3. Different levels of proof are offered for various therapies (starting with the best).
  - a. Multiple large, well designed, randomized, double blind clinical trials, subject to peer review.
  - b. Smaller randomized clinical trials.
  - c. Uncontrolled trials.
  - d. Randomized studies.
  - e. Case reports of individual patients.
  - f. Anecdotes.
4. Christians need to learn the difference between what sounds scientific or plausible and what is really proven.
5. Enthusiastic anecdotal reports have almost no scientific value.
6. Many ailments go away, regardless of the therapy offered.
7. The placebo effect: The belief that a therapy will work often leads to people feeling better.
8. Some alternative therapies do seem to help.
9. Many alternative therapies have been shown to be ineffective.

B. Many therapies are based upon an unbiblical view of spirituality and energy.

**Beware!** I John 4:1 *Beloved do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.*

1. While claims of spiritual health or holistic medicine may sound good, often these are based upon principles diametrically opposed to Scripture.
2. Many therapies rely upon invisible spiritual energy for guidance or healing. Dt. 18:9-14 I Co. 10:20-21 Lev. 19:26,31 20:6,27 II Ki. 21:6
3. Examples of therapies which have been influenced by non-Christian mysticism. Traditional Chinese (Taoist) medicine (chi), including acupuncture; Ayurveda; Reiki; Shamanism; Yoga; Massage/therapeutic touch; Classic “straight” chiropractic; Reflexology; Certain relaxation techniques (i.e. TM); Homeopathy.

4. Many therapies employ *stealth spirituality*.
  5. What if these therapies work? Mark 13:22 Eph. 6:12
- C. Some alternative approaches keep people from conventional therapies which would be of great help, perhaps life-saving.
- D. Alternative therapies are largely unregulated.
1. The government has been reluctant to regulate alternative medicine or to investigate fraud.
  2. Quality and concentration of herbal remedies varies.
  3. Medically established safe and effective dosages have not been established for many supplements.
  4. Some herbal remedies can have dangerous interactions with conventional medications.
  5. They make claims about cures which they cannot substantiate scientifically.
  6. Some therapies can be beneficial to treat certain problems, but are marketed much more broadly.
- E. Alternative therapies are often very costly. Mark 5:26 Prov. 27:12 *A prudent man sees evil and hides himself, the naive proceed and pay the penalty.*
- F. There are big problems in the Christian community.
1. Many alternative cures are being marketed to Christians in particular.
  2. Some promote their favorite cures with “religious” zeal.
  3. Many believers lack discernment.
- G. Things to watch out for.
1. Therapies which seek to channel energy or spirituality in any way.
  2. Therapies which rely upon enthusiastic testimonies, as opposed to verifiable research, as proof.
  3. Therapies which are presented as an ideology to be believed, rather than science.
  4. Claims of scientific proof, but not from reliable or unbiased sources.
  5. Therapies which cost a lot of money while taking a long time to have an effect.
  6. Therapies which blame failure on the patient.
  7. Claims of a conspiracy by the medical establishment.
  8. Therapies which claim ancient cures from other cultures.
  9. Claims that one therapy is a silver bullet which can cure almost anything.
  10. Therapies which play on your emotions, rather than encouraging you to get both sides so you can make an informed decision.

#### IV. Concluding words of advice.

- A. Learn how your body works. Eat well. Exercise.
- B. Search out the worldviews of those who originated and promote a given therapy.
- C. As; yourself, “Does this therapy make sense?”
- D. What proof is offered?
- E. Ultimately God is sovereign and eternal, we are mortal.
- F. Because of Christ, we look forward to life without pain and suffering. Rev. 21:4 22:3

## **V. Appendices.**

### **A. Recommended resources.**

#### **1. Books**

- a. **Examining Alternative Medicine: An inside look at the benefits and risks**, by Paul C. Reisser, M.D., Dale Mabe, D.O., Robert Velarde.
  - b. **Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook**, by Donal O'Mathuna, Ph. D. and Lalt Larimore, M.D. *2<sup>nd</sup> half like an encyclopedia.*
2. **Audio: NANC Conference on Alternative Medicine 2002**, available from Sound Word ([www.soundword.org](http://www.soundword.org)).
  3. **Websites: quackwatch.org**

### **B. Four categories of alternative therapies. (From Examining Alternative Medicine)**

1. **Reality based practices which don't require departure from well established principles of biology, physics & human psychology.**
  - a. **Vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies.**
  - b. **Relaxation techniques.**
  - c. **Chiropractic as physical therapy.**
  - d. **Acupuncture based on neurological concepts.**
2. **Leaps of logic which some connection with widely accepted principles of biology (at least in terminology), but then wade into uncharted territory.**
  - a. **Dietary regimens, nutritional supplements, and mega-vitamin therapies which make spectacular claims.**
  - b. **Environmental medicine: air and water, dental fillings, clothes, power lines.**
  - c. **Alternative cancer treatments.**
  - d. **Iridology. The iris displays in considerable detail the status of every organ system in the body.**
  - e. **Magnetic therapies.**
  - f. **Chelation therapy.**
  - g. **Classical "straight" chiropractic. All diseases arise from subluxations of the spine that supposedly impede nerve function.**
3. **Everything you know is wrong. Radical departure from well-established principles of biology. These therapies conceive of health & illness as contingent upon the proper flow of an invisible life energy, whose unimpeded flow through the body is considered essential to good health.**
  - a. **Taoism and ancient Chinese medicine.**
  - b. **Hinduism and Ayurveda.**
  - c. **Prana: energy from the air.**
  - d. **Kundalini.**
  - e. **Therapeutic touch.**
  - f. **Chi and traditional Chinese medicine. Acupuncture and acupressure.**
  - g. **Applied Kinesiology (also flow of chi).**
  - h. **Reiki.**
  - i. **Homeopathy.**
4. **Invading the supernatural. Explicitly claim to engage and manipulate supernatural forces and entities. Life energy medicine.**
  - a. **Psychic diagnosis and healing and psychic surgery . Dt. 18:10-12 Isa. 8:19 Mt. 24:24 I Jo. 4:1 II Co. 11:13-14**
  - b. **Shamanism.**
  - c. **Prayer as an extension of individual consciousness.**
  - d. **TM and yoga.**

- C. Life energies: articles of faith. Eph. 5:6-14 Col. 2:8-10**
- 1. All is one. Ps. 18:31 Isa. 44:6-7**
  - 2. Human beings are at their core perfect. Pro. 3:10f Mark 7:18-23**
  - 3. The most important purpose in life is to become keenly aware of our true divine nature. Rom. 5:6-11**
  - 4. Enlightenment leads to healing & other powerful psychospiritual experiences.**
  - 5. Life energy is the fabric of the universe.**
  - 6. Disease arises from an imbalance or blockage of the flow of life energy into the body.**
  - 7. Life energy can be adjusted, activated, channeled, or otherwise manipulated in order to treat illness or maximize health.**
- D. Eight keys to the wise use of supplements, herbs, and other natural medicines. (From Examining Alternative Medicine)**
- 1. Do not assume that everything promoted as “natural” is necessarily safe or even beneficial for your particular need.**
  - 2. Weigh the sources of information about anything you are thinking about using.**
  - 3. Inform any health care professional who is caring for you what types of nutritional supplements you are taking.**
  - 4. Beware of the fallacy, “If a little is good, more must be better.”**
  - 5. Find out whether the preparation you are using is intended for short term or long term use.**
  - 6. Be aware of the many factors, including quality, that can influence the effect of a product.**
  - 7. Be wise about possible adverse reactions to any medication or supplement.**
  - 8. Do not assume that the length of time a particular remedy has been in use is a guarantee of its usefulness.**
- E. Categories of therapies (from Alternative Medicine: The Christian Handbook).**
- 1. Conventional therapies.**
  - 2. Complementary therapies.**
  - 3. Scientifically unproven therapies.**
  - 4. Scientifically questionable therapies.**
  - 5. Life energy medicine.**
  - 6. Quackery and fraud.**
- F. Ten ways to avoid being quacked (from quackwatch.com).**
- 1. Remember that quackery seldom looks outlandish.**
  - 2. Ignore any practitioner who says that most diseases are caused by faulty nutrition or can be remedied by taking supplements.**
  - 3. Be wary of anecdotes and testimonials.**
  - 4. Be wary of pseudomedical jargon.**
  - 5. Don’t fall for paranoid accusations. (Conspiracy!)**
  - 6. Forget about “secret cures”.**
  - 7. Be wary of herbal remedies.**
  - 8. Be skeptical of any product claimed to be effective against a wide range of unrelated diseases -- particularly diseases that are serious.**
  - 9. Ignore appeals to your vanity. “Think for yourself.”**
  - 10. Don’t let desperation cloud your judgment!**