

# Salt & Light

Spring 2005

The Newsletter of the Social Concerns Ministry Team

*Educating and informing the church body in light of biblical principles*

You are the salt of the earth...  
You are the light of the world...

*Mt. 5:13-14*

## Editorial Note:

Approaches to medicine outside the mainstream can be blessings or curses. Some of the blessings are noted in the articles in this issue. But this issue is especially concerned to challenge Christians to be discerning, because of the connections of many so-called "alternative" or "complementary" treatments with spiritual forces or outlooks that are unbiblical. Our prayer is that the articles here will help readers to glorify God in their bodies.

## Evaluating Alternative Therapies

**From: Gary Stewart et al., *Alternative Medicine* (Kregel Books)**

Choosing whether or not to use an alternative therapy can be a complicated and confusing task. No book on alternative therapies will ever be complete because new therapies are introduced regularly. To help you make decisions, four general guiding principles are provided here.

*Realism.* Fitness, health, and beauty have been pursued passionately by baby boomers. Yet this generation is still aging and getting ill. The "perfect health" and "ageless bodies" promoted by one of alternative medicine's main gurus, Deepak Chopra, resonate well with those who have worshiped personal health and fitness. W. Brugh Joy declares in his energy healing book, *Joy's Way*, that when we recognize the power of belief

"we can create anything we desire," including good health.

But some chronic illnesses cannot be cured, only controlled. Eventually most of us who are able to avoid death by injury will some day die of a terminal illness. Alternative therapies are most commonly used to treat chronic and terminal conditions for which conventional medicine can do very little. The persistent search for a cure can sometimes become a way to deny the inevitable. At some point, people may have to accept that a cure for their condition does not exist. This acceptance can be very difficult for all involved and calls for great sensitivity. However, coming

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## Holistic Health and the Christian

**From: Perspective Paper CP0505 by Christian Research Institute**

Holistic health has steadily gained public acceptance. What exactly is it all about, and are there any reasons why Christians should steer clear from it?

The holistic health movement encompasses a diverse range of alternative approaches to health care. Advocates of the movement view it as an antidote to the inadequacies of traditional medicine, which is accused of overemphasizing the physical aspects of health and healing while neglecting its psychological and spiritual dimensions.

Holistic health proponents pride their efforts in going beyond

modern medicine's "cure" and "prevention" mentality. They seek, instead, to focus their energy on such lofty goals as personal fulfillment and self-actualization. But while these aims characterize holistic health's strongest appeal, they also testify to the movement's basic problem—namely, its subjective underpinnings. After all, is there an objective way to define and administer such a thing as fulfillment?

...A number of practices—for example, psychic healing—can be found steeped in outright occultism. It's no wonder why this movement has gained such avid support from the New Age community.

Admittedly, some holistic health

practices—biofeedback and chiropractic, to name two—offer a measure of therapeutic value. However, other applications, like iridology, are nothing more than sheer quackery. Because of these and other related problems, we strongly advise Christians not to go to holistic healers, even in such widely-accepted and innocuous practices as chiropractic, without first inquiring about the healer's personal beliefs and practices. It could prove to be the opening for the world of the occult. Above all, as Christians we must test all things by God's Word which, as Proverbs 4:22 tells us "are life to those who find them and health to a man's whole body." ☩

## Evaluating Alternative Therapies

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to terms with the reality of one's mortality is important.

As Christians, we too, can get caught up in the search for personal health and comfort. There is nothing inherently wrong with this search as long as the therapies we choose restore, improve, or maintain our life or health, i.e., they truly have benefit. But the reality is that we live in fallen bodies that, with the passing of time, groan along with the rest of creation (Ps. 90:9-10; Rom. 8:18-23). Our present and eternal hope should be in the certainty of God's love for us (Rom. 8:35-39) and His prophetic promises, not in the exaggerated claims of miracle cures, wonder drugs, and promoters of "ageless bodies." In choosing any treatment, we must ensure that our goals and the claims of any therapy are realistic.

**Stewardship.** In matters of health and healing, we should exercise stewardship of our resources. Our lives and bodies are resources with which we can serve and glorify God (Rom. 14:7-8; I Cor 6:19-20). We can use these resources wisely by maintaining our health through proper diet, exercise, relaxation, ministry, and spiritual nourishment. Prayer and wise counsel will help us balance these. Just as we consider how much we spend on our food and homes, we must question whether the money we spend on our health, whether for conventional or alternative therapies, represents good stewardship of our personal and societal resources.

Stewardship requires us to ask how effective a therapy is likely to be. Controlled studies best determine the effectiveness of any therapy. Using therapies demonstrated to be ineffective is a waste of monetary resources, which God tells us to manage wisely and effectively. Whether the therapy is a surgery, a high-tech instrument, an herb, or some energy-field manipulation makes no difference. Today's health-care resources are limited, and we must be careful not to waste them.

**Harm.** Therapies, however, can be

worse than ineffective—they can be harmful. Many alternative therapies are assumed to be harmless because they are natural while drugs or surgery are not. But many pharmaceutical drugs were originally derived from herbs. Moreover, natural does not imply harmless. Tobacco products illustrate this point. Fatalities from herbal remedies occur every year, and complications from interaction between herbal remedies and other medicines are a growing problem.

Other alternative therapies that do not involve the ingestion of products can also cause harm. There is growing evidence that meditation causes emotional and psychological problems in many practitioners. Proponents of therapeutic

touch admit that harm can be caused by "energy overload," especially with very young, very old, or debilitated patients. There is also indirect harm from using ineffective treatments if the available benefits of well-proven therapies are missed as a result. The documented potential harms and benefits of any alternative therapy should be investigated before trying it. If there is no documentation of this sort, it is usually wise to avoid that therapy.

**Spiritual Issues.** For Christians and non-Christians alike, the most serious potential harm caused by alternative therapies is spiritual.... We must evaluate each therapy in light of its claims and then see if it is actually from God (I John 4:1-3). [See final article in this newsletter] †

## Biblical Principles

From: Judy Shelly, *Journal of Christian Nursing*, Fall 2001

How can we faithfully determine whether alternative therapies can be used safely and effectively? The plumb line for the Christian is the Bible. The Bible was never intended to be a medical textbook. It does not provide us with a handy bag of tricks or a set of guaranteed healing techniques. Instead, we find some solid principles for health promotion and caring for the sick.

**Follow the laws of nature.** The health code in Leviticus provides some fascinating directives. Avoid contaminated food and water. Get enough rest. Use universal precautions—isolate people with contagious diseases; don't handle food after touching contaminated material until after the incubation period for disease has passed; wash your hands. Keep sexual contact within the boundaries of marriage. Circumcise baby boys. Be careful with body fluids. Take baths. Wash your clothes and bedding after recovering from a contagious disease. Clean mildew out of your homes. Wash your dishes. And all of this should take place in the

context of regular worship and faithful human relationships.

**The spiritual connections of a healing technique matter.** God warned the Israelites, "Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:31). When Simon the magician sought power to heal for the wrong reasons, the apostles Peter and John censured him publicly (Acts 8:9-13). When the seven sons of Sceva tried to use Jesus' name as a magic charm to cast out an evil spirit, the demon itself cried out, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" (Acts 19:13-16). Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, we see the pitfalls of turning to other gods or spirits for healing, knowledge, or power. Even if a technique appeared to work, if used for the wrong reasons or in league with the wrong spirits, it eventually brought corruption and spiritual destruction.

**Care for the sick.** In Luke 10, the story of the Good Samaritan illustrates

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## Biblical Principles

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what faithfulness to God entails. It is embodied in caring for the sick and disenfranchised. Jesus further drove home that point in Matthew 25. Prevention is important, but we will always have the sick among us. We cannot abandon them.

*It's all about faithfulness.* God does not guarantee health, wealth, success or even comfort to his people. Jesus

healed many people, but he did not heal everyone. Following God's principles for healthy living may improve our health and prolong our lives, but we will still die. Some of God's cherished children will die painful deaths at a young age. Others may languish in bodies that will never be whole until they are raised to new life. Life is not fair. But God is just, and his steadfast

love endures forever. And so, we wait for a new heaven and a new earth.

In the meantime, as we care for the sick, we can faithfully avail ourselves of all that science, technology, and faithful living have to offer. We are free to try alternatives, as long as they do not require us to compromise our good sense or our relationship with God. †

## Alternative Medicine and Christian Faith

From: Gary Stewart et al., *Alternative Medicine* (Kregel Books)

Some alternative therapies have no religious connections. For example, many herbs, diets, and instruments are promoted simply as alternatives to conventional drugs and technology. However, there is also a strong undercurrent of religious ideas behind some alternative therapies. The *New Age Journal* has noted increased interest in holistic health as the most significant change contributing to the redefining of American culture, presumably redefined according to New Age beliefs. Part of the attractiveness of alternative therapies is their form of spirituality.

A large group of alternative therapies are based on life energy. The existence and properties of this energy are intertwined with Eastern mystical religions, New Age philosophy, the occult, and vitalistic belief systems. For example, Prana is the name of the supreme god of Hindu Vedic religion that claims that the world was created through the "one god above all gods" and "lord of all created things."

Healing plays an important role in occult activity. It is said in the occult books that all initiates must be *healers*. White witchcraft is similar: Healing has been a central part of witches' activity from time immemorial, and it remains so today. Much occult healing makes use of life energy, or prana. Merely to increase the circulation of prana is sufficient to cure many minor diseases. Occult writings describe therapies for

manipulating prana (i.e., pranic or auric healing) that are identical to therapeutic touch.

Many life-energy therapies have clear connections to the occult. One alternative medicine encyclopedia notes that life force or prana can be harnessed by the individual who sensitizes himself by certain occult practices, including meditation, deep breathing, chanting mantras, advanced visualization, and secret rituals which have been closely guarded secrets of the highest mystery schools of earth...and beyond. Dolores Krieger, cofounder of therapeutic touch, admits there is a high occult factor in how therapeutic touch works. She recommends divination to obtain insight for the practice. She has noticed that as her students learn therapeutic touch, sensitivity to others as well as personal psychic sensitivity deepens. Many who undergo these changes in awareness feel that they can also communicate with and understand other sentient beings, such as trees, birds, animals, as well as human beings.

Some alternative therapies, such as Reiki and shamanic medicine, overtly recommend the use of spirit guides. Practitioners of some other therapies deny any religious dimension to their therapies, yet promote Eastern, new Age, and occult beliefs under the guise of health care. These practitioners become proselytizers, not genuine

health-care providers. God wants people to be healthy. But He is also very concerned about how they become healthy. Contrary to New Age claims, there are two forms of spirits: good and evil. Scripture states that the spiritual forces of evil are very powerful. Christians should be careful to avoid any dealings with these occult spirits and powers (Lev. 19:26, 31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:9-14; Isa. 8:19; Jer. 14:14; Acts 19:18-19; Gal. 5:19-20).

Christian tradition has always emphasized the importance of bringing healing to those who are ill. God declared Himself to be Israel's Healer (Exod. 15:26), and part of Jesus' ministry was to heal the sick. The early church continued this tradition of involvement in healing. Historians of medicine have concluded that the early church's impact on illness and health care was profound. This impact continued through the centuries.

The healing that Christianity supports is holistic in the broadest sense, encompassing physical, emotional, spiritual, moral, and relational healing. The compassionate care given by Christians over the centuries is a far cry from the cold, impersonal ways patients are sometimes treated in modern health-care facilities. In fact, both Christianity and modern alternative therapy respond negatively to any delivery of medicine that focuses on physical and psychological

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needs at the expense or exclusion of the spiritual.

However, Christian tradition is also at odds with the kind of spirituality that alternative therapies promote. The early church fathers frequently addressed illegitimate, magical means of healing that were especially popular with the cult of Asclepius, the Greek and Roman god of healing. For example, Augustine approved of taking herbs for stomach pain but disapproved of wearing them as charms for the same purpose.

The early church also responded negatively to physicians who, in addition to healing, would promote anti-Christian philosophies. Early Christian leaders were noted for discouraging their disciples from visiting "philosopher-physicians." In the third century, Origen complained that physicians too often used their

influence and position to teach philosophies that contradicted Christianity. He had in mind teachings about reincarnation and the view that human beings and all other forms of life have the same type of spirit—ideas that are common among today's promoters of alternative therapies.

In contrast to magical or energy healing, the healing power of God is not an inanimate supernatural force. God is a personal, compassionate Being who sympathizes with our suffering and to whom we can bring all

our concerns, including physical health (James 5:14-16). When our physical health and well-being are threatened, we go to Him in prayer, dependent on Him even though He may not bring healing. While we actively pursue medications and therapies that have been graciously provided to us in this world by God, we must never subject ourselves to any spiritual force—no matter what its claim—that contradicts the guidelines given to us by God in His holy Word. †

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