

# Grace Bible Church 2017 Biblical Counseling Conference Track Two

## Session #14

### Alternative Medicines and Counseling

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#### Addressing Alternative Medicine

##### I. Introduction

Biblical Principles relating to medical decisions:

- Freedom / Conscience
- Stewardship

##### Medical Decisions

- Any medical system should embrace scientific scrutiny
- Motivation should be finding truth rather than financial gain or fame

##### Evidence

<u>Reliability of Evidence</u>	<u>Type of Research</u>
High	~ Prospective Randomized Controlled Trial (blinded, repeated)
	~Observational study
	~Case Report
Low	~Testimonial (antecdotal)

##### II. Contrasting Mainstream to Alternative Medicine:

###### Mainstream

- Evidence based
- Well conducted studies
- Evidence over opinion
- Objective information
- Observable Data, Repeatable Experiment

###### Alternative

- Any therapy or substance that is not accepted by the dominant medical establishment in a given culture.
- Unconventional, Holistic, Complimentary, CAM

###### Integrative



'In addition to' ... ' instead of' mainstream medicine  
Governmental Regulations

MAINSTREAM Rx: FDA requires studies proving  
Efficacy and safety prior to release

CAM: Considered food additives, not FDA reg.  
No studies required prior to release  
Cannot claim to treat disease  
If harmful effects found, then gov't may investigate(NCCAM).

### III. Prevalence of Alternative Medication Use

- Once on the fringe now permeates our culture 58% of insurance companies cover some types  
Pharmacies full of herbs, vitamins, supplements
- Advertising in Christian radio and magazines
- Beware the 'info-mercial'
- 34 billion dollar industry
- Estimated 40% use some form
- Others eagerly share information

### IV. Reasons for choice

Real Problems with Conventional Medicine  
Allure of Alternative Medicine:  
'Natural' or 'Organic' cure  
Practitioners motivate healthy lifestyle  
Confident assertions  
Alternative to mainstream drugs and side effects  
Some therapies do work  
~30% of conventional meds from herbals  
Desperation when 'no cure' (Mk 5:26)

### V. Biblical Principles

A. Matters of Liberty and Conscience  
(Rms 14; 1 Cor 8; Col 2:16-23)

Free to use legitimate medical means  
Some therapies prohibit foods which God allows  
Biblical freedom ends where sin begins

Categories of Alternative Therapies

- Think in terms of traffic lights:

**Green** (OK)

**Yellow** (caution needed)

**Red** (avoid entirely / strongly oppose)



Green: Reality based practices aligning with Established principles of biology, physics and physiology.

Yellow: Practices with some alignment to established principles of biology and physiology but then take leaps of logic.

Red: Radical departure from biology/physiology.  
Invading the supernatural

- The Bible forbids seeking supernatural help from sources other than the one true God. We are to have nothing to do with the demonic realm.
- Not all spirituality is good. (1 John 4:1; Eph 6:12-13; 2 Cor 11:12-14)  
Seeking wisdom /guidance from spirits is divination (Deut 18:9-11)

*When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.*

#### B. Principles of Wise Stewardship

- Physical (1 Cor 6:19-20)

Godliness promotes good health  
lifestyle choices

Alternative approaches may keep people from using conventional therapies which would be of great help, perhaps life-saving.

- Financial (Luke 16:11)  
Consider cost / benefit
- Herbal remedies may have side effects/ interactions  
(natural does not mean safe...poisons in nature)

Example: Antioxidants  
(Selenium, Vit E)

“Men using these supplements should stop. Period. These supplements have no benefit, only risk.”  
“Many people think that dietary supplements are helpful, or at least innocuous. This is not true.”  
~Journal of National Cancer Institute, Feb. 2014  
(prospective randomized controlled trial of 35,000 men)

- Any medicine that has an effect has a side effect  
If no side effects, probably no effect
- Medically safe and effective dosages not established.
- Many therapies are not proven to be effective.  
False healers make claims that cannot be scientifically substantiated. (Green tea makes cancer cells self-destruct)  
~Deepak Chopra, M.D.



*The naïve believes anything, but the sensible man considers his steps. Pro 14:15*

- Alternative therapies are largely unregulated  
May contain harmful ingredients i.e. steroids, heavy metals (Ayurveda)
- The placebo effect: the belief that something will work leads people to feel better

\*\*\*\* Warning signs of Quackery\*\*\*\*

#### VI. Concluding Advice

- Biblical Principles apply to medical decisions  
Freedom, Stewardship
- Be discerning (I Thess 5:21; Mt 10:16)
- Beware of testimonial endorsements
- Possible compromise of Christian witness if  
perceived as totally gullible in these areas
- There is no 'fountain of youth'. Don't make health an idol.
- Better to spend time and effort in renewing our minds (1 Tim 4:8)
- We look forward to life without pain/suffering!  
(Revelation 21:4)

#### VII. Recommended Resources

- *Do You Believe in Magic? The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine* Paul Offit, MD, 2013
- *Examining Alternative Medications: An inside look at the benefits and risks.* Paul Reisser, MD, et al.
- *Alternative Medicine* Christian Medical Assoc.
- *About Herbs* electronic app
- Quackwatch.org website

