# “Is Acupuncture OK?”

**What do you know about acupuncture? No one in my church knows much about it except that it works.**

In a book on Alternative Medicine, written by Christian scholars at The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity, the authors noted that a National Institutes of Health (NIH) review, while finding many of the claims for acupuncture to be lacking in firm medical and scientific evidence, nonetheless reported that “acupuncture reduced nausea and vomiting after chemotherapy or surgery and was effective at relieving dental pain” (Gary P. Stewart and others, *Basic Questions on Alternative Medicine: What is Good and What is Not?*, [Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1998], 44).

But what is responsible for the limited success enjoyed by acupuncture? The above authors write:

> “Different explanations for the effectiveness of acupuncture have also been proposed. Acupuncture causes numerous biological changes, with the release of endorphins being the most significant. These compounds are part of the body’s natural way to relieve pain. Also, pain in one area of the body can be reduced when another area is irritated, which may partially explain why the needles work” (p. 44).

Thus, there are some reasonable physical explanations for the limited success of acupuncture. But are there potential moral and spiritual dangers which one must be wary of in acupuncture? Yes. To quote again from the previous source, “Caution should be exercised in choosing a practitioner. Those who adhere to its roots in traditional Chinese medicine and religion may call on spiritual powers to assist in treatments, thus exposing people to occult influences” (p. 44).

This is a very good point and we would do well to be careful of such possibilities. But of course not everyone who

practices acupuncture is involved with the occult. In fact, I'm aware of a local Chinese doctor who incorporates acupuncture (when appropriate) into his medical practice. But this man is a devout Christian and does not buy into the philosophical/religious ideas sometimes associated with traditional Chinese medicine.

So it appears that there is at least some evidence that acupuncture can be medically effective in treating pain and nausea. However, one should be careful in selecting a practitioner for the reasons stated previously.

Hope this helps. God bless you!

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Addendum 3/17/2019: A friend of Probe, Dr. Caroline Crocker, provided us with this insightful article on the worldview aspect of acupuncture, adding, "Acupuncture is based on nonChristian prescientific ideas. Sorry." It states that there is no scientific support for any mechanism that would explain a way for acupuncture to work, and that clinical trials show that it doesn't work apart from a placebo effect.

https://sciencebasedmedicine.org/reference/acupuncture/