

# Acupuncture

by Rebecca S. May

- *What is acupuncture?*
- *What is the history of acupuncture?*
- *What does the Bible say about acupuncture?*
- *Should Christians get acupuncture?*

## The Definition of Acupuncture

“Acu” comes from 17th century Latin meaning “with a needle.” According to Webster, acupuncture is “an originally Chinese practice of inserting fine needles through the skin at specific points, especially to cure disease or relieve pain.”

## The History of Acupuncture

Acupuncture is an ancient form of Chinese medicine or Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), as it is called today. Acupuncture is a practice of Taoism (a national religion of China as well as Buddhism and Confucianism). Because acupuncture comes out of Taoism, in order to understand its purpose and practice, we must first understand the history and teaching of Taoism. Taoism (pronounced “Daoism”) is “a religion adhering to a philosophical system developed by Lao-tzu, incorporating pantheism and sorcery and the practices of alchemy, divination, and magic. Taoism advocates a simple honest life and noninterference with the course of natural events” (*wordnet.princeton.edu*).

Webster defines Taoism as (1) “a Chinese mystical philosophy traditionally founded by Lao-tzu in the sixth century BC that teaches conformity to the Tao by unassertive action and simplicity” and (2) “a religion developed from Taoist philosophy and folk and Buddhist religion concerned with obtaining long life and good fortune, often by magical means.”

According to those who use/practice acupuncture, “TCM works by treating the human body and looking for signs of disharmony in the external and internal environment of a person in order to understand, treat, and prevent illness or disease. Acupuncture will balance the flow of energy, ‘Qi’ (‘Chi’) in the body, yin and yang, achieving health to the mind and body” (*Tao Wellness Center*).

*The Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine News Source* states that acupuncture was brought to the West by Professor J. R. Worsley, “universally acknowledged as the father and master teacher of Five-Element acupuncture in the modern world. He taught that every human being is a unique individual, a unique balance of the Five Elements: Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water” (*Acupuncture Today*, December 2007).

Worsley taught his followers that “nature is our guardian and requires no additional positive spin or embellishment. When we are at one with ourselves, we perceive Nature’s essential reality without mental commentary... , enabling one to cultivate a state of awareness, empty of mental chatter. When in this state of peace and stillness, one is able to clearly perceive the causative factor (CF), the imbalanced elements. Practicing this system of medicine from your senses is very easy. Coming from your head, it is impossible” (J. R. Worsley, *European Journal of Oriental Medicine*, 2006, Vol. 5, No. 2).

The goal of acupuncture, then, is to determine what is causing someone pain, which they call “causative factor.” This, they say, is an imbalance in the energy flow (qi or chi) of the five elements (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water) which exist in the body. This imbalance creates disharmony, which causes pain. Acupuncture restores the balance (yin/yang), thus “achieving health to mind and body.”

## Does Acupuncture Work?

Without a doubt, many people believe that acupuncture is affective for relieving pain. It is estimated that somewhere between 10 and 15 million Americans spend approximately \$500 million a year on acupuncture for everything from colds to depression to strokes to AIDS.

Robert Tod Carroll, in his book *The Skeptics Dictionary*, has determined that “There is no correlation between the meridians used in TCM and the actual layout of the organs and nerves in the human body.” In fact, *The National Council Against Health Fraud* issued a position paper on acupuncture that asserts, “Research during the past twenty years has failed to demonstrate that acupuncture is effective against any disease,” and that “the perceived effects of acupuncture are probably due to a combination of expectation, suggestion, counter-irritation, operant conditioning, and other psychological mechanisms” (ncahf.org).

Carroll reports that “Some research indicates sticking needles into certain points affects the nervous system and stimulates the body’s production of natural painkilling chemicals, such as endorphins, and triggers the release of certain neural hormones, including serotonin. Another theory suggests that acupuncture blocks the transmission of pain impulses from parts of the body to the central nervous system.”

Stephen Barrett, M.D. investigates various forms of health fraud. In his *Guide to Quackery, Health Fraud, and Intelligent Decisions*, Dr. Barrett references a retired family practitioner, Dr. Harriet Hall. She summed up the significance of acupuncture research in an interesting way: “Acupuncture studies have shown that it makes no difference where you put the needles—or whether you use needles or just pretend to use needles—as long as the subject believes you used them” (*quackwatch.com*).

## Acupuncture and the Bible

The Bible does not mention acupuncture. But when you consider its Taoist roots as well as the false teachings of TCM, not to mention the pagan philosophies of “chi” and yin/yang, there is no shortage of verses which can be used to address acupuncture.

The Bible consistently condemns false gods and false religions. God commanded Israel to have nothing to do with false religions—don’t practice them, don’t dabble in them, don’t associate with them, don’t have anything to do with them. *But rather, you are to tear down their altars and smash their sacred pillars and cut down their Asherim for you shall not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God* (Exodus 34:13-14).

Sadly, Israel was guilty of mixing true worship with elements of pagan religions. Joshua provided this stern warning. *Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. If it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD* (Joshua 24:14-15).

Manasseh was a king in Israel who *made his sons pass through the fire in the valley of Ben-hinnom; and he practiced witchcraft, used divination, practiced sorcery and dealt with mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger* (2 Chronicles 33:6).

Paul was particularly critical of those believers who had anything to do with paganism. He questions the Corinthians, saying, *what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,” says the Lord. “AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN; And I will welcome you. And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,” says the Lord Almighty* (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

## Conclusion

Acupuncture should be avoided for many reasons. First, there is no scientific evidence that acupuncture works. Although it seems to make some people feel better, it has not been proven medically to be doing anything. As John Ankerberg points out, “the latest scientific research studies have yet to demonstrate acupuncture’s effectiveness. For example, research published in

*The Clinical Journal of Pain* (June 1991) concluded that acupuncture was ‘at best a powerful placebo’” (*Journal of Clinical Epidemiology*, 1990, Vol. 43, pp. 1191-99).

Second, even if it ever were proven to be physically beneficial, that would not make it right. Just because something works does not mean it is pleasing to God. God does not want us to neglect our bodies, but He’s also clear that your physical needs are of secondary importance (1 Timothy 4:8). You may think that acupuncture is the best way for you to deal with your pain, but God never gave you the right to determine what’s in your best interest.

Finally, acupuncture is inseparably tied to the false pagan Taoist religion. And the Bible is clearly against believers associating in any way with the teachings or practices of false religions. Taoism claims that you need to have harmony within yourself. God says, *what harmony has Christ with Belial* (2 Corinthians 6:15). Taoism is concerned with your physical life and good fortune. God is concerned with your spiritual life and good character (Romans 5; Galatians 5). TCM practitioners claim that acupuncture restores your physical and mental balance. David claims that it is God *who guides me in the paths of righteousness, He restores my soul* (Psalm 23:3).

\*Note: Acupressure is a more modern form of acupuncture. It maintains all the philosophical principles of acupuncture, applying pressure to points instead of needles. It is, for all intents and purposes, no different than acupuncture.

## Questions and Answers

**Q:** *What is acupuncture?*

**A:** Acupuncture is “an originally Chinese practice of inserting fine needles through the skin at specific points, especially to cure disease or relieve pain.”

**Q:** *What is the history of acupuncture?*

**A:** Acupuncture is a form of Traditional Chinese Medicine and is part of the Taoist religion. Acupuncture came to the West through J. R. Worsley, who claims that pain is the result of an imbalance in your energy flow which exists within your body.

**Q:** *What does the Bible say about acupuncture?*

**A:** The Bible does not mention acupuncture, but the Bible repeatedly warns against idolatry and idolatrous practices (Deuteronomy 12:30; Joshua 23:7; 1 Corinthians 10:14; Galatians 5:19-20).

**Q:** *Should Christians get acupuncture?*

**A:** No. Acupuncture is a practice rooted in a pagan and idolatrous religion. Acupuncture promises some sort of inner peace and physical harmony. But God says, *what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, “I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Therefore, come out from their midst and be separate,” says the Lord. “And do not touch what is unclean ...”* (2 Corinthians 6:14-17).