

# CHRISTIANS AND THE MARTIAL ARTS

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With the growth of the martial arts in the United States over the past 20 years, Christians have been faced with some difficult questions. Can a Christian, in good conscious, undertake a study which is supposedly designed to harm others? Can a Christian become involved in a life style so tightly bound to the Orient with its cults and spiritism? Doesn't the Bible teach the Christian to turn the other cheek and refrain from violence?

At the same time, the Christian is to be in good physical condition, to be mentally alert, to be a man of discipline, able to care for his own family. He is to have a strong self-control, is to be faithful and steadfast in pursuit of goals, and he is to portray a sincere humility and servant's heart. The martial arts have long held to these basic tenets and a serious student will acquire them. Thus, the earnest Christian faces a dilemma. Can he or she stay true to the Bible and be a martial artist? Let's answer these questions as well as lay the framework for any martial arts system that would be true to its origins.

First, I would caution the reader. If you are a sincere Christian, you may have a difficult decision to make. You may no longer be able to remain affiliated with your school because of its teachings or practices. Then too, if you are a sincere martial artist, you may have to rethink and change several areas of your particular style so that you can maintain your link to the original teachings.

I have encountered several good and well-meaning Christians who have questioned my involvement in the martial arts. My martial arts teams have conducted more than 80 public demonstrations over the past eleven years to thousands of people. Frequently, it will be brought to my attention that a certain youth group would not be able to attend a demonstration due to a sincere position held by the leader that the martial arts was not a proper Christian influence. The issues raised can be grouped into three general questions:

- I How can a Christian be involved in something which promotes violence?
- II The martial arts are rooted in, or at least connected with oriental spiritism or the occult. Shouldn't a Christian avoid that?
- III The Bible prohibits the use of force. How can a Christian justify his participation?

### **I) Christian Involvement in a Violence Promoting Sport**

I would be the first to admit that this issue along with the other two can be valid. My contention is, however, that given the right instructor and the proper focus on the martial arts, none of these issues need be of concern. To the contrary, in that setting, the martial arts can provide those positive character traits and training that the Christian desires.

Much of the cause of the problem in this area is a false impression of the true martial arts based on what one would see on the screens of today's movies, television programs and videos. Man will naturally gravitate towards activities that please and excite the sensual and the physical. This is a direct result of the fall of man and to be expected, if not accepted as the norm. The motion picture industry all too well caters to that desire. Thus, we see frequent violence, unnecessary vengeance, quick ill-tempered responses, and a seeking for the “mystical” spiritual oneness and self satisfying justification in one's actions. This does not represent the true martial arts, but unfortunately it forms the common perception. It is also the motive behind many beginning practitioners. A better, although still inaccurate, portrayal of the martial arts could be seen in the television show of the late 1960's titled “Kung Fu” with actor David Carradine. Here you see a true servant's heart, an active avoidance of violence, tremendous self-control and discipline, an ability to effectively disarm an aggressor with minimal force, and a very important dependence on the spiritual dimension (albeit, not the Spirit of the original martial arts as will be demonstrated later).

A true approach to the martial arts is to avoid violence. Romans 12:18 states that: “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” We will see more of this verse latter, but for now let us consider this command to the Christian as a martial artist. A bonafide martial arts school will train and develop in its students several character traits. Among these would be an ethical system including justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, veracity or honesty, honor, duty, loyalty, and self control<sup>1</sup>. With these character traits and a solid physical capability to utilize the weapons that God gave us, a martial artist would:

- have no need to “prove” himself when insulted or taunted
- have the mental “mind leading” abilities to control or disarm a threatening situation
- recognize the immaturity in resorting to physical means to resolve a conflict (more disciplined)
- avoid places where fights are likely (pool halls, video arcades, bars, back alleys ...) because he is not only wiser, but also because he has developed a higher degree of morality.

The “fruit” of the Christian martial artist should match that which is identified in Galatians 5:22-23: “... the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control ...”. This list is remarkably similar to that in the previous paragraph identified by Inazo Nitobe in the book referenced above<sup>1</sup>, written in 1899. If the instructor of the martial arts school does not teach this dimension and more importantly live it, then I would encourage you to seek another school. Every martial arts is based on a spiritual system, which then provides a mental approach, which finally results in a physical style and set of etiquette to guide its usage. Thus, it is not only wrong, but dangerous to study from an instructor who has the wrong spiritual or mental position, regardless of how “Effective” the physical skill might be. In the same vein, if the instructor possesses this set of characteristics, then it would be virtually impossible

for a student with the wrong motives to last long enough in that school to learn enough to be dangerous. Either he will quickly despair at the regimen required and quit, or he will gradually acquire the patterns of his role model, the instructor. This again points to the importance of the proper instructor.

Finally, consider the alternatives. Assume that you are confronted with a person determined to harm, rob or take advantage of you. You are unable to avoid it or “talk” your way out of it. What are your options? I would suggest four likely outcomes:

- 1) You could allow yourself (or your wife, sister or children who are with you) to be abused, robbed or injured. I would remind the Christian reader that 1 Timothy 5:8 states that if a man does not care for his own family, he is worse than an infidel.
- 2) In spite of no training, you could nevertheless try and forcibly defend yourself or those with you. The result could be that you are injured even more, or you could very possibly in your rage seriously injure the perpetrator beyond what was necessary or reasonable.
- 3) You could turn to a friend who is with you and have him do your fighting. However, if it is wrong for you to use violence, it is no better to “hire” another to be your mercenary.
- 4) If you have received the proper training in a variety of martial arts techniques, you could effectively and rapidly stop the attack with a minimal amount of force, and without serious injury to the attacker.

## **II) The Martial Arts are Connected to Spiritism and the Occult**

Another common misconception held by many is that the martial arts originated in the Orient and thus grew out of the religions of the Orient. Any serious student of the Bible or of history would quickly see the fallacies of this position. It is not the purpose of this paper to debate that position. I would however refer the reader to any of several texts which show historical roots of the martial arts in the Middle-Eastern region around Israel and Egypt<sup>(2 and 3)</sup>. Likewise the Biblical roots of the martial arts are demonstrated in three other referenced articles<sup>(4, 5, and 6)</sup>.

First off again, I would hasten to state, that this is a valid objection. Indeed, many if not most modern martial arts schools are based on Zen, an eastern mysticism, or the occult. Again, my premise is that this need not be the case. The Christian is called upon by God in 2 Timothy 2:15 to “study” to find and determine those things which are acceptable to God. The worst thing that a Christian can do is to “adopt” as his own the rules and program of others or a hierarchy. They may well provide valuable input, but this is not to replace the students own serious study. An excellent example of this is evident in the area of astrology<sup>7</sup>.

The common perception is that astrology is connected to the occult. Christians are actually told to avoid it as foolishness and dangerous (Jeremiah 10:2). Interestingly enough, it was God who originally created and ordained “astrology” (Not to be confused

with the astrology as practiced since the dispersion at the tower of Babel). In Genesis 1:14, we read that God created the stars "... for signs, and for seasons ..." The original text carries the meaning of "things to come", "evidence" and a "beacon". This is also supported by Psalm 19:1 where we read that the "... Heavens declare the glory of God ..." The "signs" of the heavens, the Zodiac, was laid in place by God and not only gave the history of early man (Genesis 1 - 9), but also clearly told the story of and pointed towards the coming Messiah. This story and testimony of the heavens was communicated by God to Adam and used prior to the availability of written revelation. At the risk of belaboring the point, it should be of interest to the reader to know that the "sun-god" of ancient paganism (derived from the stars) had 12 supporters and that through the treachery of one, the god was slain. With the exception of a belief in the GOD and the blood atonement of Jesus Christ, all the articles of the Apostle's Creed are to be found in the paganism which existed in the world prior to the writing of the Bible.

The point then to be made is that Satan in his never ending quest to destroy the "seed of the women", Jesus Christ, sought to take systems created and ordained of God and used effectively for God's purpose, and pervert them. He took the signs of the heavens and used them to set up a one-world religion pointing to the antichrist. In like manner, Satan took a system of self-defense, of self-discipline, of mental control which was used by God with Abraham, Joshua, Caleb, Samson, Gideon, Caleb, David and others, and perverted it for his own use by replacing Biblical truths with his own value system.

Proper and authentic martial arts training involves the development of three area of the individual. The spiritual, mental and physical dimension of each person must be challenged and grown in parallel to ensure the proper balance of the martial artist. This is not just a Biblical truth (Luke 2:52, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, 1 Samuel 16:23), each of the major religions of the world also stress these dimensions of the individual. More importantly, the spiritual aspect must be foremost, as it provides the moral system with which the skills will be used. The mental dimension provides the mind leading capabilities and self-discipline that enables one to master and utilize the physical techniques. A further look at each of these dimensions is appropriate to understand where the controversy resides.

The physical dimension is merely the application of the laws of physics and body anatomy. It is technique regardless of martial arts style, and can not be objected to as evil or wrong in and of itself. Moreover, the Bible does place an emphasis on staying in good physical shape (1 Timothy 4: 8).

The mental dimension is the discipline of the mind. This is where your confidence comes from as well as your ability to control an intimidating situation. Here too, the Christian should have no objection, but rather a positive emphasis. The Bible frequently references the importance of the mind in the every day activities of the Christian. Proverbs 23:7 teaches us that "... as he thinketh in his heart, so is he..." If we think we can, or think we can't, we are right. Galatians 6:9 encourages us to (keep doing what is right because in the end we will reap our reward if we "...faint not", which means to give up in your mind. 1 Corinthians 9:27 exhorts us to mentally be in control of our body, for if the body

and its desires control our life, our missions/goals will not be achieved. Hebrews 12:3 encourages the Christian to remember Jesus in times of stress and despair, or else we will become "... wearied and faint in your minds". Judges chapter 6 and 7 gives an excellent example of "mind leading" by Gideon, where he effectively defeated a massive army with only 300 soldiers.

The third dimension, the spiritual, provides the philosophy by which the arts themselves are taught. This is the area where criticism is valid. It is here that several non-Christian religious systems (including materialism and humanism) have taken over martial arts styles. However, the facts and techniques of the physical and mental dimensions themselves are still the same. Thus, if the spiritual dimension and structure of the style is solid Christian, then the outcome will match that of the original and authentic martial arts. It is not enough to have a Christian as a teacher, the entire style and system must be built upon Biblical truths. Unfortunately, in modern times, this is very definitely the exception and thus there is reason for concern among several Christians. It is not the intent to describe a Christian system in this article, although it has and can be done quite effectively.

Another area of contention relates to a misunderstanding of the concept of "Ki". How this "force" is explained and implemented can allow unbiblical principles to get a foothold in the martial arts system. Several modern practitioners will reference the Ki or Chi or the "power within" and call upon the students to enter a state of meditation, empty their minds and seek the "force". Clearly this is a non-scriptural and dangerous practice. However, the Bible does clearly teach that there is a center of gravity and source of strength within the body. Proverbs 3:5-6 tells us how to bring "... health to thy navel ...". This can be a controlling and use of the natural body adrenalin. In Job 40, the Lord speaks to Job and calls upon him to "Gird up thy loins now like a man ... " (verse 7) and again in verse 16 the Lord states that "... his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly." The word "loins" and "navel" refers to that area of the body just below the navel and in the center of the body. The Lord in giving His final counsel to the churches in Revelations 2:23 states that He is the One "... who searcheth the reins and hearts ...". Here we once again see reference to the "essence" of the individual. Thus the concept of "Ki" itself is not wrong, and a Biblical development of it can greatly improve the ability of a martial artist to effectively utilize his skills. This development would have to include the proper form of meditating in the word of God (Psalm 1), inscribing God's law within our heart (Psalm 40:8 and 119:11) as well as proper physical and mental training to focus the center of gravity and power of the body.

### **III) The Bible Prohibits the Use of Force**

People will commonly in a glib fashion state that the Bible teaches us to turn the other cheek when injured by another. This clearly shows a lack of in-depth study and searching of the Word of God. It also has contributed to many unnecessary injuries to Christians and others.

Matthew 5:38-42 contains the teaching of “turn the other cheek”. Rather than teaching of pacifism, the Lord is really teaching about the Old Testament law of retaliation. The Jews were very familiar with the Old Testament teachings of “an eye for an eye ...” found in Exodus 21:24; Leviticus 24:20 and Deuteronomy 19:21. They also were aware that these Old Testament statements were not commanded punishments, but merely an allowable recourse that one could legally insist upon for the satisfaction of an injury. This was for a very good reason. Laws of behavior, along with appropriate punishment, are essential for any society to exist. These laws of retaliation were given to the Jewish nation to keep people from breaking the law and destroying society and ensure the punishment was fair and equitable. Thus, in the Matthew passage, Jesus was reemphasizing the need to forgive an injury to yourself and not insist on punishment other than for the common good. He was stressing that we must not be revengeful (Romans 12:19) and that we must be charitable and help those who would hurt us (develop a servant's heart).

What does the Old Testament have to say about the use of violence? It would not be difficult at all to fill a book about the sanctioned use of force and attack in the development of the nation of Israel. This was done to not only punish the sins of heathen nations, but to also protect the integrity of the Israelites. One other point must be stressed regarding the Old Testament. During the dispensation of human government, God gave a clear law for the common good of all. That was the use of capital punishment, to be carried out by the government upon any who committed murder (Genesis 9:6). This law was not part of the Mosaic Law (ceremonial laws) and thus was not part of the law that was done away with when Jesus came.

In the New Testament we will also find several Biblical principles regarding the use of force to defend oneself and to uphold the law. One of the more familiar ones is Romans 12:18 where the Apostle Paul teaches us how to behave with those outside of God's family. Here the Word of God states, “If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” Note the most important first word. “If” denotes uncertainty and conditionality. To be sure, we are to strive to achieve peace and not cause injury, but it also indicates that there will be situations where this is not possible. In those situations, which is the more Christian response: to cause serious injury to the other, to be seriously injured yourself, or to effectively disarm the situation utilizing a wide range of martial arts techniques? You see, the martial arts is not just about punching and kicking. To be effective a system should teach the student effective ways to avoid the trouble thru mind leading, to enact nerve centers and put a person in a hold while they rethink their motives, to get out of holds without causing injury to the other, and to quickly attack and end a conflict before extended injury can occur. Along with all this goes the spiritual and moral system of a responsible code of behavior.

The Apostle Paul in 1 Timothy 5:8 teaches that men are expected to meet the needs and provide for the protection of their family. Without some method of self-defense or a reliance on the defense of others (for instance the law enforcement establishment), this would be impassible.

The Lord Jesus Himself utilized force as He drove the money changers from the temple in righteous indignation (Luke 19:45-46). Christ Himself will also lead those who have trusted in His blood sacrifice on Calvary, into the last battle, which will be far from a Sunday school picnic (Revelation 19:11-14, 19-21).

Finally, a righteous God, who loves the sinner, also hates the sin, and is obligated to judge and punish sin. This theme is seen throughout the New Testament especially in the following passages: Luke 12:47 punishes the servant who knew the right thing to do and willfully chose to do differently. Romans 13:4 warns us that if we do evil, we must and will be punished by God ordained authority, the government. Revelation 20:10 shows the final punishment of the Devil for his disobedience. Luke 16:23-24 gives a clear description of the punishments of Hell for those who have rejected Christ. Clearly physical force is one of the options used by God as the need arises.



## **Summary**

The martial arts, while most frequently connected to a non-biblical system, need not be that way. It is possible to have a very strong and vibrant Christian martial arts. This was not only present in historical Biblical times, but has also been effectively demonstrated today. The need for this type of training for the youth of America has never been greater. But it would be better to not be a part of the martial arts, than to be associated with a system or class which has as its basis a philosophy which is clearly non-biblical.

Each individual practitioner must chose carefully and each teacher should seek to rebuild their system upon the right set of principles.

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