

**Martial Arts and Christianity:**

**The One-Two Combination**

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“How can you justify a violent sport like karate in a church?” This question or similar questions have often come up when I tell someone about **Karate for Christ**. It’s a fair question and one that, I’m sure, has been asked of most of us involved. In the following pages, I will endeavor to answer this question as clearly and thoroughly as I can.

To begin, I think it would be helpful to understand a bit of background to karate, particularly Chinese kenpo karate.

In the second century A.D., a famous Chinese surgeon developed a series of moves to promote good health. These moves were later developed into a martial art. In the sixth century, a warrior from India further developed these movements as a form of exercise to help the monks to keep fit, because their lifestyle involved a great deal of meditation and little activity. These early movements were probably never intended for fighting. Over time, they were developed into a means of self-defense, but physical health and conditioning remained a principle purpose, and benefit, of this art. The same holds true today.

Besides physical conditioning, there are many other benefits of karate. For instance, students develop psychologically, gaining a much more positive attitude, strong character, and self-control. The ability to focus on a task and concentrate is developed, particularly through learning and performing sequences of techniques, or katas. Learning these katas also builds memory skills.

Since karate is promoted as a competitive sport, the student also develops good sportsmanship, learning to be a humble, gracious winner, and a good loser. Everyone who competes in a tournament experiences victories and defeats,

thereby growing in emotional maturity. As one progresses through the various belt levels, self-confidence also grows.

While the aforementioned benefits are all wonderful, at **Karate for Christ** we believe the most important growth area is the student's spiritual development. Whereas traditional martial arts are typically based in Eastern mysticism, we have removed it. Instead, we teach Christianity as our spiritual component, through an awards program for Bible reading, memory verses for each belt level, and by including a short Bible lesson at the conclusion of each class. These lessons usually combine Biblical principles and teachings with martial arts concepts. It's amazing how well the two go together. Prayer is also a frequent part of a lesson. And whereas traditional martial arts promotes meditation and honouring past masters, we teach our students to meditate on God's word and to honour Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour.

But is karate too violent to combine with Jesus' teachings of love? If abused, yes. But then, many good things can be turned to evil by abuse. It all depends on the attitude of the user, and as I have mentioned, karate seeks to develop a good, healthy attitude of courtesy and respect. In fact, these two attributes are taught to the beginner white belts as the two most important words in karate.

Another early concept we teach is that there is a proper time and place for karate...in the dojo. In fact, anyone using karate inappropriately, to hurt someone, is severely disciplined (usually suspended for a period of time for the first offence and expelled from the club if repeated). In fact, we teach a philosophy of "talk, walk, defend", which means that when confronted by an aggressor, the first response is to attempt to reason with the person. If this fails, the next step is to walk away (or run if necessary), keeping an eye on the aggressor. Only in the event that the person pursues and attempts to harm the

student are they taught to fight back and they are taught to win. And in such a case, the techniques are designed to end the confrontation as quickly as possible.

Although developed as a fighting art for real-life threats, today karate is primarily practiced as a sport, through tournaments. Here the focus is mainly on execution of techniques, in katas or self-defense demonstrations. In sparring events, the combatants are well protected with helmets, gloves, and padded boots. Usually, these matches are well-controlled point-sparring, with only light contact allowed. In fact, because of the strict rules and controls, karate tournaments have far fewer injuries than many other sports like hockey and football.

Not everyone, however, practices karate in order to compete in tournaments. There is also the very practical benefit of self-defense. Unfortunately, we live in a world where violence is becoming more and more commonplace. Pick up any newspaper and you can read about gang violence, assaults, rape, abductions and robberies. And these things are no longer restricted to the major cities, but are in fact happening with ever increasing frequency in the smaller cities and towns as well. By learning practical, effective techniques of self-defense, the martial arts student has a significantly greater chance of not being the next newspaper headline. With a working knowledge of karate, at least they have a fighting chance.

Or consider this scenario. You are walking in the park or through a parking lot, and you come across a man assaulting a woman or a child. Do you choose not to get involved for fear of serious personal harm? Unfortunately, this is the most common response. But if you were properly trained, you could be instrumental in saving that woman or child from serious harm or even death. In "The Life and Death Debate", co-authors J.P. Moreland and Norman Geisler wrote:

“To permit murder when one could have prevented it is morally wrong. To allow a rape when one could have hindered it is an evil. To watch an act of cruelty to children without trying to intervene is morally inexcusable. In brief, not resisting evil is an omission, and an evil of omission can be just as evil as an evil of commission. Any man who refuses to protect his wife and children against a violent intruder fails them morally” (Moreland & Geisler; P. 134, 135).

Naturally, we all pray that we will never have to use our art in a real-life situation, but just knowing that one is capable brings a sense of reassurance and self-confidence.

So what does the Bible tell us? Actually, there are many examples in the Old Testament of God supporting his people in battle. The Israelites had to fight and conquer their enemies to win the Promised Land (Joshua 5:13 – 12:24). Samson slew a thousand Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey after “the spirit of the Lord came upon him in power” (Judges 15:14, 15). As a young man, David called upon the Lord and defeated the giant Goliath (I Samuel 17:45-51). Later, as king, David led his army to many victories in battle (2 Samuel 8). God seems to have no problem with the use of force to overcome evil.

We are also told to protect and defend the helpless. Who in their right mind would question the use of force to subdue someone who was attacking a child? I have no doubt that God would approve of such an act.

In closing, I can only say that anyone who has difficulty with teaching karate to kids (or adults for that matter) is being a bit narrow-minded, especially if the teaching is combined with a strong grounding in Christianity. And since there is such a growing interest in martial arts, as evidenced in the multitude of martial arts schools springing up everywhere, it makes a great outreach tool for churches. I only wish someone had thought of it when I was growing up. I

thank my sensei for his vision, and I thank God for the opportunity to learn and to teach others in this dynamic ministry.