

Martial Arts, Combat Sports and Self-Defense

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Sadly enough, since Cain and Abel violence and warring have always been part human life. Of course the circumstances and tools of fighting have changed over the millennia, from spontaneous fights involving biting, scratching or clubbing to Asian martial arts featuring hundreds of techniques for sophisticated unarmed or weapons fights. We no longer meet the latter in movies alone. Our country today offers fighting techniques many centuries old, or their modern versions, independent and mixed schools, systems which do have a deep cultural and religious background and systems which, by principle, do not emphasise their backgrounds.

As for Christians, several questions concerning the topic are in need of clarification. What do we have to know about Asian martial arts? What are the differences between various schools? What makes them appealing? Why do some quit? Can a Christian also do Karate or Kung-Fu? What should you do if you had been practicing it for many years and now got saved? What does the Bible say about self-defense? What is the difference between martial arts, combat sports and self-defense? Where are the limits?

Since the topic is rather complex and the Bible does not provide us with a continued, in-depth teaching about it, it is hardly surprising that Christians hold differing opinions. This article seeks to provide a comprehensive outline of the topic and highlights some thought-provoking aspects in order to help the decision of all those who find this topic interesting, who are personally involved, or would like to counsel others.

1. About Martial Arts

Almost everything that we call martial arts today is of Asian origin, for the European systems were either incomplete and thus fell into oblivion, or were only retained as sports disciplines (e.g. fencing, wrestling, boxing). The primary agents of Asian martial arts in the Middle Ages and in modern times were soldiers (e.g. the Samurai in Japan), though there have always been fighting monastic orders they could compete with and learn from (e.g. the Buddhist Shaolin monastery in China). Normally peasants could not even possess weapons, thus apart from their hands and feet they had to learn to use their own tools as weapons (knives, dibbers, sickles, oars, thrashers, etc.).

Martial arts involved very complex training. Approximately three fourth of the training provided preparation for armed fights, while one fourth for unarmed fights, as fighting tended to continue even after the loss of one's weapons. Additionally, they also had to learn how to swim in armor, how to bind the captives, or how to handle various injuries fast. Their spiritual education was provided by the religious tradition of the country: in China it was primarily Taoism, whereas in Japan Zen Buddhism.

(a) Changes in the 20th century

Generally speaking, concerning Asian martial arts in the 20th century a strong separation of the curriculum of unarmed and armed training was observable. Moreover, unarmed training became more emphasized. Thus

today it is no exaggeration to talk about three so-called genres:

- systems primarily involving hits and kicks (e.g. Karate)
- systems primarily involving grips and throws (e.g. Judo)
- systems primarily involving weapons (e.g. Kendo).

Of course there are many overlaps between these systems even today. On the one hand Judo also used to involve hits, while Karate used to feature throws, though these are only practiced at higher levels today. On the other hand originally mixed schools (e.g. Jujitsu) still exist. Nevertheless, there are several reasons for the changes mentioned.

Firstly, the military *arsenal* has changed drastically (e.g. instead of bows we have shotguns). Traditional weapons have either been completely eliminated from war conflicts (i.e. bows, swords), or at least have been completely transformed (the spear as such no longer in use, but bayonets fixed at the end of rifles). Secondly, the later descendants of martial arts schools once almost exclusively open only for men are today training large crowds of *men and women civilians*. Proper, professional mastery of the curriculum of most traditional schools still requires 10 to 15 years even today, and old weapons are still in use (long stick, sword, saber, spear, etc.). However, today's civilians on the one hand are short on time, and on the other hand are more interested in defending themselves against modern weapons (knives, sticks, pistols). Thirdly, since the mid-20th century Asian martial arts schools have been teaching crowds of *Western* civilians as well, who live in an environment substantially different from the Far East of the Middle Ages.

(b) Their Background in Worldview

Asian martial arts have evolved as parts of the peculiar Asian cultures. The religious ideas and philosophical speculations of their creators not only affected the theoretical foundations and mental education provided by these systems, but often times even influenced the form in which their techniques appeared. Let us now look at the background of the schools featured in our country today in terms of worldview, religion and spirituality:

- The various Kungfu and Wushu schools are of Chinese origin. Their background is Taoism (e.g. Tai Chi, Hsing-I, Pa-Kua) or Buddhism (pl. Shaolin, Choy Lee Fut), or a mixture of the two (e.g. Wing Chun).
- The various Karate, Kempo, Aikido, Jujitsu, Taijitsu and Sumo schools are of Japanese origin, as well as the primarily armed fighting schools: Kyudo (archery), Kendo and Iaido (fencing), and contemporary schools of medieval terrorists (Ninjutsu). The spiritual background to these is Zen-Buddhism (e.g. Karate, Kempo, Kendo, Kyudo), Sinto Animism (Sumo), one of sects of Sinto called Omotokyo (Aikido), or a mixture of Amida-Buddhism, Sinto and Taoist mysticism (Ninjutsu). At the same time, though the first Judo training took place at a Zen-Buddhist monastery, owing to its great international prevalence and its inclusion among the Olympic disciplines, it is considered a completely neutral sport in terms of its worldview today. The same is true for most of the Western

Jujitsu schools.

- The schools of Taekwondo and Hapkido are Korean in origin. Their spiritual background consists of Taoism and Confucianism; however, compared to the Chinese and Japanese schools Taekwondo for instance has gone West with an almost negligible missions goal, and even became an Olympic discipline.
- Muay Thai (Thai Boxing) originates in Thailand; its spiritual background consists of Buddhism, as well as local animistic ghost-cults.
- Shirayan Vajramutthi is of Indian origin, with a background in Hinduism.

Finally, just as a matter of curiosity let us also mention two *non-Asian* schools, which through a mixture of musical and dance components and fighting elements have embarked on a cultural mission as well. One of them is Capoeira from Brazil, which depending on the instructor can be completely neutral in terms of its worldview, or may just as well be built upon one of the Brazilian ghost-cults. The other one is the so-called Hungarian Baranta, which seeks to revive the armed and unarmed fighting traditions of the shamanistic period of the ancient conquering Hungarians relying on help from ethnographers and a modern Kempo school.

(c) Their Cultural Mission

For centuries Asian martial arts could *only* be learned by *Asians*; their art was considered a national treasure, jealously guarded. In the 19th century, through means that can hardly be called fair and peaceful, the West opened up the world's culture and economy to the so-far isolated countries of China and Japan. At the same time, in the midst of the Western cultural chaos of the 20th century, everything that came from the Far East became fashionable. That is why since the 1960s Far-Eastern masters have been proud to impart their knowledge to Westerners, and have been more or less consciously also on a powerful mission to spread their culture and worldview.

This mission can have a large number of manifestations: the compulsory uniform of the trainees (the clothing, colored belts, training barefoot or in sandals), the typical Asian master-disciple relationship (ranks, titles, bows), mental preparation (meditation), the philosophical background to be acquired (Taoist, Buddhist speculations), or the utilization of certain energies described as spiritual, mental or physical (e.g. Chi Kung).

As for the training itself, here in the West it is technically *for the instructor to decide* how much all of this is incorporated into the training. At the same time it is also true that certain ("inner") schools are more inclined towards mysticism, such as Chinese Tai Chi and Japanese Aikido. Moreover, the Karate, Kempo and Kendo schools are naturally open towards Zen-Buddhism.

Concerning levels of training, some of those who have achieved everything that can be achieved through physical and then mental training feel the need to *move on* to the realm of spirituality where the goal becomes the acquiring of superhuman powers. However, only a fraction of Westerners ever reach this point.

(d) Their Reception in the West

As mentioned earlier, most of today's Western disciples - in line with the spirit of the age - feel naturally drawn to Far-Eastern culture, esthetics and worldview. Thus, even elements alien to the general setting of Western life are considered appealing, such as moving around barefoot wearing Japanese peasants' clothing (*gi*), wrestling while kneeling on the *tatami*, or practicing with medieval Asian weapons.

There are some who are exclusively and primarily interested in the *eurhythmics* of it all: they enjoy the harmony of a refined set of motions, thus they see this practice as a chance to do sports, or a tool for self-expression or healthy living. Others are drawn by the *fighting* aspect, that is, the techniques which are considered more effective and better developed than those of European boxing or wrestling. However, there are great many for whom practice turns into *lifestyle*, and they practically convert to one of the Eastern religions, or their "westernized" counterpart.

However, if this sort of attraction is missing, practical aspects dominate decisions, thus many Westerners rather seek schools developed in the West, which offer no mysticism, but pure self-defense (e.g. Krav Maga), or sports discipline (e.g. Kick Box). The curriculums of military, antiterrorist, and civilian self-defense systems have understandably only adopted some of the Eastern martial arts techniques, since in the world of pistols, UZI submachine guns, hand grenades, truncheons and sprays new circumstances called for new methods to be developed. In terms of mental preparation also, more confidence is placed in psychological research that specializes in this field and has a better understanding of today's Western culture and man.

Nevertheless, it should certainly make us stop and think to see how natural it has become for whole crowds of European youth for instance to wear Japanese peasants' clothes, to learn dozens of Japanese, Chinese or Korean technical terms, to follow orders in those languages, to bow or kneel before the altars of the training halls, or the pictures of the founders, to become vegetarian, to do Chi Kung, to do Reiki, or to believe in Karma. Yet one wonders how natural would the reception be among Asian youngsters if their African-American Baptist instructor there to teach them boxing, wrestling or basketball invited them to a joint *prayer* to Jesus before the training began?

2. Related Biblical Passages

(a) On Health Preservation

Even though the Bible teaches that not only the believer's body, but their whole being is the temple of the Holy Spirit, neither soul nor body must be neglected. Thus regular exercise (e.g. swimming, jogging, hiking) or sports (e.g. athletics, ball games) are recommended to all, for it is not only beneficial for our bodies, but also plays a vital role in maintaining our mental working capacities and our emotional balance.

There are of course a few passages in the Bible that some relate to this topic, saying that God is not pleased with any type of sports, especially martial arts. With all due respect, perhaps we should re-examine these texts.

Romans 8:5, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit the things of the Spirit" may at first glance suggest that it is sinful to care about the things of the body. Yet if this were true, it would be the physically self-neglected, the smelly, the

overweight and the weakened that are really spiritual... However, taking a close look at the context will reveal that Paul is talking about something completely different here. Firstly, the term “flesh” does not mean the physical body, but the person in and of itself, without God. Thus “flesh” is a moral term. This is also how we should read the list of sins in Galatians 5:19-21, where even social conflicts, such as selfish ambitions and contentions are mentioned among the “works of the flesh”, as Paul is not talking about the physical body, but about sinful tendencies we grew so well used to as non-believers.

According to the New King James translation 1 Timothy 4:8 says, "For bodily *exercise* profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come". This may cause us to think that every form of exercise is unprofitable. Even though Paul in this verse uses the Greek term “gymnastia” from which the English word “gymnastics” originates, we need to understand that in those times this term was used as a synonym for ascetism. Moreover, if we also take a careful look at the context it becomes clear that it is not sports that Paul here is contrasting with a real fear of the Lord (compare Colossians 2:20-23), but rather the meaningless ascetism of Gnostic false teachers (4:3).

When in Romans 13:14 Paul talks about physically caring for our bodies, he simply warns us not to let it lead us into sin. He does not go into any details, but leaves it to his readers to make sober decisions.

When Peter in 1 Peter 3:1-6 advises women on how to win back their husbands to God who were disobedient to God, he does not speak against good appearance, make-up, pretty clothes or jewellery in general, but rather goes into explaining that *these are not the things* that are going to bring their husbands back to God, but instead the unfading beauty of their inner, spiritual life.

A healthy lifestyle involves both a healthy diet and regular exercise. Whether we then take it up as a hobby (mass-sports) or a profession (education, competition) is for us to decide. There are many professional Christian athletes seeking to be salt and light in a tough working environment. Paul’s attitude gives us a great example, “All things are lawful for me, but all things are not *helpful*. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought *under the power* of any” (1 Cor 6:12)”. Therefore *if* a sports activity - like anything else – causes spiritual dependence that is too strong, or harms our body, we must stop and think about whether or in what form we should continue to do it.

Thus, the Bible shows us that to neglect our bodies based on certain principles, or to be obsessed with our appearance, or to consciously harm our health, or constantly put our bodies into harm’s way are equally unacceptable.

(b) About Fighting Disciplines

Many Christians seem to harbor a strong prejudice against fighting disciplines. Soccer, basketball, table tennis or tennis are okay, but who needs the cauliflower ears of a wrestler or the broken nose of a boxer? Will not those that practice wild things turn wild themselves, as they also learn to wrestle, trip, hit and kick? And will not those that receive too many neuron-damaging head blows eventually become feeble-minded? So the question is: does it affect character and health in a good or bad way?

Interestingly enough, the Bible speaks about the Christian walk as a real fight, in which we need to hold our

ground both against an enemy from without (the Devil and the world) and a betrayal from within (the “flesh”, that is, our selfish tendencies). This is what Paul the apostle wrote to Timothy, “You therefore must endure hardship as a *good soldier of Jesus Christ*. No one *engaged in warfare* entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a *soldier*” (2Timothy 2:3-4).

And when describing the spiritual weapons of the believers, Paul likens them to the armor of the Roman soldiers (Ephesians 6:10-18). It is true he mentions “spiritual” weapons, for he is talking about *spiritual warfare*, in which people are not the enemy (Ephesians 6:12), and where well-known human methods profit nothing (2Corinthians 10:3-6).

However, it is unlikely that Paul the apostle would bring an example of something that he absolutely condemned. And fighting disciplines can help develop and maintain a *fighting spirit* so essential to Christian life. For the fighting does not only involve our bodies, but our minds as well; therefore, it always teaches us more than just the right grips and hits: it shapes our character. It teaches us to respect our enemy, to recognize our limits and also how to go beyond them – without these no healthy self-confidence is built. It teaches us to set our eyes on the goal, and helps us understand that we even must want to walk the walk – without these we can never obtain a healthy sense of achievement. It teaches us that it is possible not only to give but to receive, and that the tough guy is not the one who gives, but who endures. It also shows us the fragility of the human body, and that aggression is contemptible.

It cannot be a mere coincidence that Paul compares himself to a runner and a boxer when writing about the fights of his own Christian walk. “Therefore I *run* thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I *fight*: not as one who beats the air” (1Corinthians 9:26). Paul’s God and our God are one and the same, “The LORD is a warrior” (Exodus 15:3, Isaiah 42:13). And just like Timothy, we as Christians are also the Lord’s soldiers, warriors.

(c) About Self-Defense

According to the Bible, man was made in the image and likeness of God, as a representative of God, created by God. Yet ever since mankind started to follow their own rules, God through His law has had to actively intervene into humanity’s ever more violent lifestyle (compare Genesis 6:5).

We can see God condemn Cain’s act of murder against his brother, motivated by unbelief and jealousy (Genesis 4:8), yet at the same time he puts His sign on Cain in order to prevent people from *taking justice into their own hands*, so that Cain cannot just be freely killed by anyone at any time (4:18). Later we see Lamech’s senseless, unscrupulous, *me-defensive* spasm that could lead to a disproportionately brutal act of self-defense (4:23). The Bible condemns this as well, yet does not comment on it, trusting in the reader’s own sense of judgement. Later on, in the period of the Mosaic Law, it was not killing in general that God forbade in the Ten Commandments, but pre-meditated, heinous evil-motivated murder (Exodus 20:13 “You shall not murder!”). For this could not happen in Israel, in a theocratic society created to be a light unto the world. Another interesting Mosaic Law about rape (Deuteronomy 22:23-29) held out the prospect of punishment for a girl who was “raped” within the city, yet did not call for help because it naturally presupposed an urban society where someone calling for help would immediately receive help and physical protection. (Sadly enough, our alienated, indifferent metropolitan lives have wandered rather far from this...). The well-known

“eye for an eye” principle (Exodus 21:23-25) speaks about proportionate punishment (“to give life for life, burning for burning, scar for scar, black eye for black eye”), yet not by way of personal revenge, but within the framework of relevant community procedures. Moreover, the community’s task was not only to administer punishment, but also to get people back on the right track again, “Learn to do good, seek justice, rebuke the oppressor” (Isaiah 1:17).

To sum up, in a period when the nation of Israel was fighting for its existence and was struck by civil wars the use of self-defense was no question: those who did not defend themselves died. Many Old Testament warriors became heroes of faith for New Testament Christians as well (Hebrews 11:32-34).

Later on even John the Baptist did not ask the soldiers to leave their profession, but rather to stop acting aggressively, to quit blackmailing others and be content with their salaries (Luke 3:14). Jesus even set the faith of a Roman centurio as an example (Matthew 8:5-10). However, certain things changed upon the arrival of the new covenant. On the one hand, the now international fellowship of believers was scattered all around the world, living under different systems of state and law. That is why only general principles were laid out for them: it is their duty to obey the authorities (Romans 13:1-7, 1Peter 2:13) up to the point their conscience allows them to (Acts 5:29), and in general they should seek to maintain a good relationship with everyone, inasmuch as they can (1Thessalonians 5:15, Romans 12:17-18).

At first glance it may seem hard to decipher the words of Jesus at the Last Supper recorded in Luke 22:31-39. Jesus tells his disciples that Satan wants to sift them, and that Peter is going to deny him three times (enemy from without, betrayal from within). Then he goes on to remind them that over the course of the years they have spent together they lacked nothing, “*But now*, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a knapsack, and he who has no *sword*, let him sell his garment and *buy one*” (22:36), for everything had to be fulfilled in Jesus (he will be killed). “So they said, Lord, look, here are *two swords*. And he said to them, *it is enough*”. And they went to the Mount of Olives. Some believe Jesus here has had enough of the stupidity of his disciples, while others believe Jesus implied that two swords will be enough to defend themselves. Owing to the internal contrast (“but now”) of the text, the latter explanation seems more probable.

Therefore the New Testament primarily talks about what the believer should do in times of injustice and persecution. It does not tell us *anything* concerning physical self-defense – except for Luke 22 perhaps – even though certain passages seem to teach on this very topic at first glance. With all due respect, these passages should perhaps be re-examined.

(d) About dealing with unfairness

As for active self-defense, certain sentences of Jesus may imply that a believer must not take any action against evil men, and God will be the one taking revenge. Yet as we will see, none of the passages actually speak about physical self-defense, but rather about dealing with *unfair situations* in a Christ-like manner.

Jesus’ most quoted teaching on this topic is found in Matthew 5:38-42, “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth’. But I tell you not to resist an evil person...”. First of all, Jesus is

quoting from the Mosaic Law, which lays down the just principle of fairness and proportionate compensation. Yet Jesus here does not argue against this principle, but rather he argues for *something more*. According to Jesus' teaching things do not necessarily have to escalate to the point of becoming a legal and public issue. A sense of fairness and a love of the enemy (Matthew 5:44) can together provide the kind of self-control and backbone which can prevent conflicts from evolving *further*. The real winner is the one who does not allow the proclamation of war to escalate into active fighting.

“But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also”. First of all, Jesus here refers to a one-time and obviously wrongful *slap on the face*, and is not talking about what to do when a robber and killer attacks our family, or when we receive well-deserved correction. Secondly, if the aim of the slap is to correct us, it will have humiliation as one of its important components, especially if it is done in front of others (that is also why it is no tool for child instruction!). However, when someone is slapped *wrongfully*, they know that the agents have no moral grounds for their blow: the stranger, non-stranger, wife or child slapped did *nothing* to deserve it. Turning the other cheek to the agent and maintaining eye contact with them will have to make them realize: if they hit again, they bring moral destruction upon themselves right in front of their own eyes and in front of others. In these situations it becomes clear who is stronger: the one who does not run, the one who does not return the blow, but stays right there and *decides* that a later apology will be enough for them because they do not want this issue to escalate into a fight. When Jesus himself was hit on the mouth for no real reason, he did not wait passively for another slap, but called the perpetrator to account for the unjust deed he committed, and no one dared to question the fact that he was right (“If I have spoken evil, *bear witness* of the evil, but if well, why do you strike me?” John 18:22-23). Violence against women and children is of course a whole different issue; women and children should of course be immediately isolated from such men.

The two remaining examples Jesus mentions also talk about us not letting things get out of hand. If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also” (Matthew 5:40). This passage once again does not imply that the believer should give up every form of legal self-defense, and allow everyone to use them as they wish. This issue is not about trying to take “*even his tunic on top of everything*”, for in that case offering one's cloak would hardly make sense. It is a case of minute and petty litigation, for let us not forget it is about the tunic, that is, the *undergarment*. In such situations a generous offer can prevent money, time and soul-consuming litigations. “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two” (5:41). In those times Roman soldiers were allowed to compel passers-by to carry their equipment. In such cases it was mandatory for the people to help the soldiers. The idea behind this is that when Roman soldiers see that this other person was willing to help them without whining or pretending, perhaps they will act more friendly next time and refrain from threatening the people.

The following question then arises: will generosity not cause the one who wants to be aggressive, litigate, and give orders to grow even bolder and more cruel? It is possible of course, and indeed many examples could be mentioned to prove it, yet it is not necessarily always the case, with God's help there are other alternatives. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome *evil with good*” (Romans 12:21, 1Peter 2:2,15).

This active goodness is part of following Christ (1Peter 2:19-20), which can only spring from a personal moral decision, and which is nourished by the understanding of the other party, by self-control, and by faith in God's presence, power and wisdom.

When a believer follows Christ's command to love one's enemies, they provide an opportunity for those that show animosity towards them for no apparent reason to eventually feel ashamed and compelled to change the state of affairs themselves (Romans 12:20). If there is something the believer can do legally and with a clear conscience about the issue, then they indeed need to stand up for their own rights (Romans 13:1-7, Acts 16:11-39). If for reasons outside their control this is not possible, and the unjust state of affairs is maintained, or no fair compensation is provided, they must not take revenge, but need to trust God in everything, who is able to intervene (Acts 12:6-11), take revenge (Romans 12:19), and even forgive those that sinned (Acts 7:54-60). If it is clearly spiritual warfare in which the "enemy" (the other person) is only a tool, without them even realizing (compare Ephesians 6:10-18), then apart from loving the enemy prayer is the only legitimate and effective tool in the believers' hands (e.g. Acts ch. 3-4). If believers suffers persecution and abuse for their faith alone, even then they need to place themselves into God's hands (1Peter 4:12-16).

Finally we should mention that the kingdom and power of *God* is in no need of human, earthly tools in order to advance, or to defend itself. The best example is provided by the story of Jesus' arrest (see John 18:6,36). When the disciples wanted to defend Him, Peter incredibly awkwardly even managed to cut off one of the temple servants' ears. Jesus immediately stopped their endeavor (Luke 22:49-51), which first of all would have hindered God's plan (John 18:11, Matthew 26:54), secondly it was unnecessary because of the host of angels present and thus the proper balance of power (Matthew 26:53), thirdly because in such instances believers themselves are sure to get into trouble (Matthew 26:52). Sadly enough, church history all too well demonstrates the truth of Christ's words (crusades, etc.).

3. Comparison

(a) Self-Defense and Martial Arts

Of course Asian martial arts *do have* an aspect of self-defense, though it is also widely understood that their level of applicability in the everyday life of Westerners *differs*. Every martial art can provide training in self-defense, yet most of the modern self-defense systems *cannot* be considered martial arts in the classic sense of the word for various reasons.

The first great difference lies in the legal aspect. Asian martial arts are *martial* arts; most of them were developed for times of war, which naturally shows both in their tactic and techniques. Yet the legal standing of a soldier and a police officer always differs from that of the civilians. The former are armed by the state and authorized by the state to search for, arrest and perhaps even kill someone. The civilians on the other hand are only allowed to kill in extreme danger provided they would simply not be able to escape without it. It is therefore logical that martial artists and civilians are in need of and have access to different strategies and tools to match their differing goals.

The second aspect is *responsibility*. Even though the goals and tools of military-police personnel and civilians *cannot* be the same, martial arts schools today teach civilians virtually unaltered ancient military methods, only reserving perhaps the use of some “sharp” methods and weapons to certain levels of efficiency. (Proof of this also lies in the large number of techniques *forbidden* in competitions yet regularly *practiced* in training sessions). Even though traditional martial arts schools once took responsibility for their trainees through their military or family hierarchy, this is rarely the case in the West today. Theoretically there are well-known moral principles in existence (e.g. the fact that the one doing Karate never attacks first), but most of the schools do not provide moral and legal instruction as to how to translate these principles into everyday life. Yet one would be naïve to think that no one is ever going to use their acquired knowledge for evil. Since today practically anyone can learn martial arts if they pay the tuition fee and cause no trouble at training, sadly enough by now way too many people involved in school fights, street fights or bar fights seem to have received some sort of fight training. Therefore martial arts training today, the primary aim of which is to prepare civilians for dangerous instances of provocation, threats and violence from another civilian, has also adopted the goal of developing strategies and tactics against criminals well-versed in martial arts.

The third great difference lies in the fact that it takes *many years or decades* of meticulous work to learn martial arts, with its artistic and athletic movements and to acquire the almost superhuman abilities it requires. In self-defense training there is neither time, nor a need for this. In terms of physical requirements one should consider ordinary individuals: techniques are needed that can be acquired by men, women and the elderly alike, and that work even without an initial warm-up. There is no need to have a bone-breaker’s strength, an extremely sophisticated set of movements, or a set of thousands of techniques, on the contrary: there is need for a few techniques that work and can be relied on automatically in every situation.

Fourthly, in most of today’s martial arts schools, self-contradictory as it may sound, usually everything possible is done in order to *avoid stress*. Trainees do their training in a nice, clean hall, wearing nice, clean and dignified clothes. They move together, they shout together upon command. There are titles, ranks, rules of good form, continuous respect for the place, the master and for one another. Though not everywhere, this is usually the atmosphere that awaits us. Yet this in essence means, even despite the sweating and the fighting gestures and sounds, that they are aiming for predictability, the maintaining of internal harmony, and thus basically the avoidance of an adrenaline rush as such. However, getting as close to reality as possible constitutes an integral part of self-defense training. This in turn calls for the environment, clothing and noise of everyday Western life, and a preparation for very real situations that may arise in this setting today. For instance a sudden rise in the adrenaline level that is aroused by an unexpected event or physical confrontation can only be learned to master in a stressful, close-to-real-life situation. It is not constant combat-readiness that is required, but rather the ability to switch *on* instead of switching *off* when suddenly facing trouble. Moreover, civilians cannot seek to fulfil the goal of fighting until they have kicked every single attacker unconscious (like in the movies); their only real aim is to get out of harm’s way as soon as possible, and make it home safe – as Krav Maga declares for instance, which originates in Israel.

(b) Self-Defense and Competitive Fighting

In times of peace ancient martial artists could open schools or dazzle civilians at various shows. Of course wars still break out today, yet their participants – apart from perhaps commando soldiers – are not the martial artists of our times. Most of them prefer to stay in the training hall, knowing that whatever they are learning was originally a “sharp” technique that is *not meant for competition*. Even those that welcome challenges will only challenge each other, and then only within the framework of fair competitions with strict rules. However, there are also some modern gladiators that specialize in unsportsmanlike fights (e.g. cage fights). Of course the use of “sharp” techniques is forbidden in competitions. Instead, they break tiles, wood, concrete or ice with hands, feet and head proving what they *would* be able to do up against another human body, and what their body can *take*. They all do it for different reasons: to show their strength, for the sake of the challenge, for money or less often as part of their religious rituals. Yet there are not many in number: there is one competitor for thousands of mere trainees.

Competitive fighting is usually done for fun, while self-defense is something we are forced to do.

Competitive sports do everything they can to secure conditions of *fair play* for the competitors, while an instance of self-defense is in many ways an instance of emergency that normally people will try to avoid. For in such cases no separate weight categories exist, the attackers are usually bigger, stronger and larger in number. There is no time limit, the attack usually comes unexpectedly and happens fast (things are a matter of seconds). No mandatory protective equipment is available, and the prospects usually involve severe physical (and psychological) injuries or worse. There are no rules, therefore anything can happen; there are no fan supporters, for help is rarely provided; and there are no prizes to win, for it is really all about survival.

(c) Self-Defense and Street Fighting

The street as such – at least for the properly socialized – is no place for exhibitionism, for parading one’s strength, or for seeking challenges, for the legal setting of the street differs from that of the training halls or public competitions. There is also something else at stake here: a beloved one’s or one’s own property, health or even life. In contrary to fist fights and street fights self-defense is about *protecting values* acknowledged by society.

(d) As Disciples Even in Self-Defense

The person forced to use self-defense continues to be Christ’s disciple. Even though they basically constitute the smaller, the weaker, the loser party, and thus by utilizing the strategy of the weak they have to fight in a smart and “filthy” way, yet they must by no means be senselessly and disproportionately brutal (see the rule of thumb in Matthew 7:12, Luke 6:31). A good self-defense instructor is known by teaching students to recognize the situation, so that they can then decide what *is* and what *is not* necessary. And the believer who takes practice seriously will soon come to realize that here once again they are in need of God’s help and prayer, as is always the case.

“Controlled aggression” needed for an appropriate self-defensive reaction is a whole different topic. For it is one thing to recognize the situation and then automatically choose the necessary strategy or technique, but how do we handle the sudden rise in our *own* adrenaline level caused by the conflict we find ourselves in?

On the one hand we need proper training, and on the other hand we need self-control that comes from character (compare with Galatians 5:23).

Finally, self-defense techniques are not only worth acquiring for our own protection, but also to be able to help *others* in times of need. Sadly enough many men, women, children and pensioners are left alone because there is no one to help and protect them.

4. Pieces of Advice

(a) Recommendable Schools

Based on the above we do not generally recommend Asian ways of fighting and martial arts schools to Christians, especially not their translation into a lifestyle. However, doing or teaching sports, competing, and learning or teaching self-defense is another thing. Therefore – because of their neutrality in terms of worldview and their role in health preservation – we can recommend the following schools to *Christians*.

In terms of fighting disciplines or competitive sports we can recommend wrestling or Judo to *men*, though most women do not favour wrestling-type sports owing to the constant physical contact it involves. The Olympic discipline Taekwondo can be recommended to *both men and women*, within a semi-contact framework, with gloves, a protective foot gear, a mouthpiece, and a suspensor for men and chest gear for women. To *children* under fourteen we could recommend wrestling and the Olympic discipline Judo as a competitive discipline, and perhaps Taekwondo. An important note to make here is that the only school for civilian self-defense we can recommend for adults and children is the Israeli Krav Maga, especially recommended for women. However, before you start anything please make sure you have consulted your GP, physiotherapist or rheumatologist, in order to have a clear understanding of what you may or may not do physically, and also consult your instructor as to what you need to be especially careful about in training.

(b) Those that Quit

There are many who after long years of practicing martial arts became Christians and quit completely. The reasons for quitting are at least as manifold as the people and lives themselves, yet their testimonies usually touch upon the following three areas:

- Reasons of religion and worldview: the person for instance used to practice martial arts as a Buddhist or Taoist, and since for them religion and training became completely intertwined, as Christ's disciples they not only rejected the fighting techniques in question, but also the worldview and spiritual methods that came with.
- Spiritual-moral reasons: the person as Christ's disciple feels that their personality has been negatively affected (pride, aggression, selfishness, exhibitionism, controlling others, etc.), and would remain under a negative influence if they continued practicing martial arts.
- Health reasons: the person acquired (lasting) injuries when practicing martial arts, or caused (lasting) physical injuries to someone else; whatever made it profitable in terms of physical training, can also be found in other disciplines, and thus they chose the latter alternative.

At the same time there are those who got saved, but would like to continue to practice martial arts. They argue...

- that they can separate the religious background of these schools from the physical training that they need,
- that they do not find that it would distort their character,
- that their presence among martial artists is an opportunity to share Christ with them.

One cannot question the honesty of those who think this way, and as long as they find that it has no negative effect on them everything is fine. Yet even they should perhaps give another thought to why they started training back then. What was their original goal, and what could the goal be *now* for a disciple of Christ?

(c) Those That Would Like to Start

As mentioned earlier, we *do not recommend* Asian martial arts with the exception of Judo and Taekwondo as Olympic disciplines. To those that would like to learn a fighting discipline or a system of self-defense we can offer the following advice:

First of all, they should honestly think about why they *want* to do it:

- Do they really just want to be fit, or rather become a “tough guy”? Would they really like to learn *self-defense*, or simply want to take revenge on somebody? Do they really see it as a tool for developing self-control, or would they simply like to pride themselves in their rank or knowledge before others?
- *How much* time, money and energy is it going to cost specifically? And *where* are they going to take it from: their family, their job or their time spent with God? Where are the limits, and what is the guarantee that they will never go beyond those limits?

Secondly, understanding their own physical makeup they need to check

- what kind of physical abilities are needed to acquire the system in question (does it require an athletic, or just an average makeup?),
- what kind of physiological and physical effects does this system have on the one practicing it (back, bones, joints, nervous system)?

Thirdly, trainings are usually open for anyone to observe. These times allow us to see for ourselves what the personality of the instructor is like (good teacher or dictator, a sportman or businessman, tolerant or fanatical, etc.?). Then it is worth talking to the *instructor* and asking him a few questions:

- Is becoming acquainted with and adopting one of the Eastern worldviews part of the training, and what worldview does the instructor hold (pl. believer, Christian on paper, no religion or a convert to one of the Eastern religions)?

- Is there meditation before and after trainings, and if there is, what does it involve exactly: only relaxation (psychosomatic calming down) or for instance a Zen-Buddhist method?
- Does one have to acquire the use of certain powers or energies (*Chi, Ki*), and what does the instructor consider these to be (physical-dynamical energies, mental human capacities, or superhuman, spiritual powers?), and how does he tell the difference?

Fourthly, it is advisable that from time to time we double-check the above mentioned aspects along the way. As for motivation, it is good to have someone who knows us, pays attention to us and puts us back on the right track if necessary. As for physical strain, we should consult our GP or a specialist (sports surgeon, rheumatologist) if problems arise. Finally, concerning neutrality in worldview, if something is not the way they promised, soon enough it will certainly show.

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