

The following is a response to the inquiry of a serious Christian scholar and mother regarding her daughter's participating in karate. The daughter has done so for two and half years and very much enjoys the sport. Mom asked for my thoughts on the subject. Though I have not exhaustively researched the subject, I have spent some time pondering it. Here is my response:

Should My Christian Daughter Participate in the Sport of Karate?

Your question begs several other questions and so requires several separate answers. First, know that personally I am favorably disposed to personal defense training. Physical training is of "a little profit," as Paul terms it. I will not discuss this aspect. A friend of ours did a Biblical study on the subject and not surprisingly found that morality is more critical to our health and life. Nonetheless, the Scriptures treat us as whole beings, our bodies a part of our wholeness and integrally important to our life in Christ. We are not of an essentially split nature, body and spirit, but a unity of being which one day God will resurrect wholly. The in-Christ part is, of course, of central importance. Nothing of any value may be said of any subject apart from our consideration of Christ on His terms, meaning for us, His revealed Word. With respect to your particular question and future research, you might consider the following.

May Christians Use Coercive Physical Force?

Regarding the use of defensive coercive force by Christians, the answer should be clear. Throughout the Old Testament, God supports defensive war. David, the man after God's own heart, was a "mighty man of valor." That is, he possessed both a warrior's strength and skill of mind, and a warrior's strength and skill of body. Jesus told His disciples to buy a sword. His hindering Peter's use of the sword pertained to timeliness and His present mission--the Cross--and not a general condemnation of its use. When He said those who live by the sword die by the sword, neither did He make a blanket condemnation. Paul teaches that the magistrate properly bears the sword. Solomon says that when the wicked rule, the people groan. Unless Christians must only groan—an absurd thought—then the righteous must both be capable of wielding the sword and effectively wield it. For the righteous, defensive war has always maintained its appropriate place in Christian doctrine, except in the variable passivity of the Anabaptist heritage. The physical sports originate in an approximation of and preparation for war, though often used for mere entertainment and pleasure. Except for the context of our discussion, I am tempted to say it's a guy thing.

Upon the example of David and many others including Paul the Apostle, I conclude that for the sake of the Gospel and righteousness the good boys should be at least as tough as the bad boys. Faith requires valor or courage. Due to the physical nature of life and its trials, the overcoming of physical trials, exercising faith, often best builds valor. Physical challenges are essentially mental ones. (This does not at all require a warrior's body. Not everyone possesses one, yet all may fight the good fight. The man who has lost the use of his legs, for example, faces even greater physical challenges of courage and faith.) In a word, the exertion of force such as in the combative sports builds character and therefore appears as a positive thing. This view presupposes a balance of forcefulness with the self-restraint in motive and action—the meekness—required of a Christian. For the natural man, such a balance seems absurd. For the Christian, such a tension is ordinary. We accept both because Christ requires and enables both. Therefore, tough sportsmanship has always been Christian America's way of life.

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Created August 12, 2002
Modified May 13, 2008

Personal defense, like the need for war, stems from serious or mortal danger imposed by another where no appeal to a higher authority exists or is readily accessible. Scripturally, the just war, as with Jephthah and the Ammonites, is essentially an appeal to heaven to decide between adversaries (Judges 11:27). The justice of the *cause* is an important consideration. The justice of *means* is another one. Indeed, though one may both bear a righteous cause and a righteous and conduct oneself by faithful means, for reasons known only to God, the righteous may fall in battle. Thus, the signers of America's Declaration of Independence pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor, to secure the same to their neighbors and posterity. Almost uniformly did those American fathers greatly suffer in this life.¹

With respect to personal danger, the Christian legal tradition permits force for self-defense. This is so upon the same principle as the just defensive war. For example, John Locke equated an assault on personal property to be equivalent to an assault on life, as one depends upon one's property to support life.² Therefore, in personal theft, the thief properly forfeits his life. Exodus 22:2 says, "If a thief be found breaking up (in), and be smitten that he die, *there shall* no blood *be shed* for him." In other words, the Bible accepts lethal, defensive, personal force. Not only is personal *self-defense* appropriate, but Dr. Rushdoony quotes John Calvin as declaring that Christ's Law of Love *requires* defense of one's helpless neighbor.³

East versus West

Differences between Eastern and Western fighting styles raise Christian concerns. First, *Martial arts* do not necessarily mean *Eastern* martial arts. Western forms are also *martial arts*. Eastern religious thought governs the form of *its* fighting. The basic presupposition is that individuality does not truly exist. Therefore, if the fighter *centers* himself in the cosmological One of the universe, he should prevail.

"We believe in the formless and eternal Tao, and we recognize all personified deities as being mere human constructs. We reject hatred, intolerance, and unnecessary violence, and embrace harmony, love and learning, as we are taught by Nature. We place our trust and our lives in the Tao, that we may live in peace and balance with the Universe, both in this mortal life and beyond." Creed of the Western Reform Taoist Congregation.

Tao (pronounced "dow") can be roughly translated into English as path, or the way. It is basically indefinable. It must be experienced. It "refers to a power which envelops, surrounds and flows through all things, living and non-living. The Tao regulates natural processes and nourishes balance in the Universe. It embodies the harmony of opposites (i.e. there would be no love without hate, no light without dark, no male without female.)"⁴

Such a view is consistent with virtually all ancient paganism, such as in Biblical Egypt and Babylon. God, through the prophets, thoroughly denounced and judged the cultures resulting from that paganism. It resulted in the greatest tyranny and inhumanities. The Taoist view today represents the mainstream in Eastern thought and religion. Man and god, except where one "backslides," are one and the same. Therefore, centering, mind-emptying meditation, and approximating the behavior of animals are all fundamentally a part of the pure Oriental martial arts. To the degree the Eastern martial arts have here

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westernized in form, and better, Christianized in the hands of orthodox Christians with an understanding of the implications, we are less concerned. Every subject, except the occult, must be redeemed in the hands of the redeemed, because every subject and endeavor will bring godly influence to the world, when once it is taken captive to Christ. Satan is no creator, only a corruptor of what God made good. Therefore, our job is to efface the effect of sin, as a vessel in God's hand. To redeem the martial arts means removing their pagan and occult elements. Christians should not practice the associated religious rites of the martial arts. In a tae kwon do class I attended, run by Christians, one instructor, a young Baptist woman, led Oriental, emptying meditation. I quietly invoked our Lord in prayer instead. Afterwards, I respectfully informed my instructor I would not participate in the activity and explained why. She could not understand my objection, and I could not understand her. The whole Oriental system rests in the essential *oneness of being* principle in complete opposition to the faith of Jesus Christ.

By contrast, Western forms of fighting include very rigorous, self-limiting rules. Due to the influence of Christianity, the West adopted the principle of *clean* fighting. The Christian view of the medieval knight had the good guy handing back his adversary's sword so that he would not win through circumstantial advantage. The man of God knows the battle belongs to the Lord, and secures victory through His strong arm, not by personal might. The classic boxing style represents the West's typical fighting form. The Marquis of Queensbury rules exemplify this principle. (I know. The Marquis is not exactly an exemplary character, but the rules nonetheless express a sense of Christian restraint, what we like to call *fair play*.) To redeem the Oriental styles, Christians must remove the inherently pagan elements from them.

I think that certain styles are better suited to a Christian view than others are. I personally do not maintain an inherent opposition to the use of feet, legs, elbows, etc. in fighting, but do prefer Korean Tae Kwon Do as apparently the most "Western" of the Oriental styles. Part of the issue is how westernized the teaching process has become in practice versus how strictly close to the original Eastern historic and religious views they adhere. Part of the issue concerns the level of danger one suffers with respect to the strength and prowess of one's opponent. Additionally, in analyzing the use of tactical trickery (if you will) by ancient Israel at God's direction (e.g. Joshua 8:4), we might not make much of an issue over what is "fair." Samuel used deceit to gather the followers of Baal. Such considerations require mature wisdom.

A related question concerns the degree of force consistent with the Christian faith. Mutilation such as eye-gouging and destroying joints is "fair" in kung fu, ju jitsu, and the other Eastern warrior arts. Lethal force is ordinary. However, these are essentially *war* arts. From a Christian viewpoint, the degree of necessary force is an essential consideration. The capacity for great harm inherent in the Oriental martial arts requires very careful consideration, teaching and practice of the Christian. One thing is sure: To produce mutilation or death as the result of an insult or relatively minor threat entirely contradicts the teaching of Christ. The Law of God limited just penalty, an eye for an eye (meaning economic restitution corresponding to the loss of use or the forfeit of a life in capital crimes).

Women and Fighting

How appropriate are the fighting arts for women? Women are people, too! Yet God made women different from men, a weaker vessel. Therefore, God gave men to protect women and all vulnerable

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souls. On the other hand, the Biblical woman of faith shared with faithful men a similarly strong character, as Ruth for example. Some participated in acts of war. In the Book of Judges, Jael, warrior-like, applied a tent stake to the head of Sisera. Judge Deborah assisted Barak, apparently receiving the glory of victory at men's expense. I draw certain conclusions from such incidents and from the general ability of women, dare I say disposition, to fill spiritual vacuums left by men. While spiritual leadership for a woman is not the Biblical norm, women often appropriately rise to the call. We should assign any blame toward men who create such a vacuum of spiritual leadership. Increasingly, due to Christian cultural irrelevancy and inaction, American streets are no longer very safe in which to dwell. If men have left the streets unsafe, I conclude that a woman should be able to defend herself, though such ought not to be necessary among a Christian people.

Apart from defense, women possess humanity, the same unity of spirit and body, which men do. Therefore as for men, physical exercise is at least somewhat important for health and a good and godly life. My one reservation here is that many sports tend to develop masculine physical qualities and manners in women. Heavy, masculine-like exercise apparently produces male hormones which will bring masculine physiological changes. This is tragic. I once heard that a beautiful twenty-year-old woman should thank God for her gift. However, if a woman is not beautiful at age 60, she has only herself to blame. I think there is a great deal of truth to this. Feminism has done a great deal of damage to women's self-image (as well as men's). The unique feminine graces are a gift from God. Therefore, the Mosaic Law forbids women wearing that which "pertaineth to a man." Women are moral equals to men, that is, in value and in their ability to contribute to the Gospel in their unique, god-blessed way. Nonetheless, women are different from men and they do injustice to themselves and to God when they ignore their special gift of femininity. Again, that does not mean that the feminine woman must be weak, ignorant or irrelevant! I have reared three daughters and taught them to be submissive to rightful authorities, including father and husband, but to be bold in making appropriate and wise contributions to their homes and communities upon a well-prepared womanhood. Remember Proverbs 31! Our faith always requires careful balance, to maintain the narrow path which leads to life. Such a balance for women includes physical strength and ability appropriate to their femininity.

Final Thoughts

Even where the martial arts are taken as pure sports, I believe that we ought to consider their warfare aspects, as they *will* develop damaging and lethal skills. The potential for the use of deadly skills always exist. In a similar vein, those who advocate the use of firearms for personal protection implore the prospective gun owner to decide the moral question of defensive lethal force *before* purchasing a weapon.

As you can see, this is not a simple question. Christian expressions never are. They require the acquisition of wisdom. Godly solutions, like the American Constitution, arise from finely crafted effort learned over time, often out of great adversity. We will make mistakes in the short run. We identify the good and bad fruit. We make corrections and we try again by faith to produce expressions which truly glorify God.

Therefore, I recommend that you re-evaluate your daughter's program on the above grounds. While your daughter's enjoyment is important, it ought not to be determinative, but rather God's will. If the present program seems a sound instrument for your Christian objectives, then you can make the personal

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corrections required to satisfy your conscience toward your daughter. Your conscience *is* important! If you cannot easily mitigate the negative influences, I suggest finding a more suitable instrument for her studies. Remember! Jesus said that it is enough to become like your teacher (Matthew 10:25 and Luke 6:40). In the first reference in Matthew, Christ speaks negatively, referring to Beelzebub as teacher.

The best and final solution will find skillful and wise Christians beginning to re-construct the martial disciplines upon a thoroughly Biblical ground.

Ronald Kirk is engaged in research and development promoting Chalcedon's work to the Christian education market. Please write! Ron would enjoy receiving your feedback, with any questions, dialog or request for educational topics, at ronaldwkirk@goldrush.com.

¹ Rush H. Limbaugh Jr., "The Americans Who Risked Everything," *Limbaugh Letter*, September 1997 (<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/4827/risk.html>).

² John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government* (New York: Mentor, 1963), pp. 320-321.

³ R.J. Rushdoony, *Institutes of Biblical Law, Volume One* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1973), p. 219-220. I recommend this volume as a major resource for research on the subjects of life and property.

⁴ "History of Taoism" (<http://www.religioustolerance.org/taoism.htm>). This article is typical. A simple Web search on Martial Arts and Centering will give a good idea of the thinking. See <http://userpages.itis.com/wrassoc/articles/wa.htm> as an example.