

# The Spiritual Danger of THE MARTIAL ARTS

Dr. Russell K. Tardo

Billy Jack, Bruce Lee, David Carradine's "Kung Fu," Chuck Norris, the Karate Kid, Ninja Turtles, and a host of others have made karate very popular in America. The martial arts were already popular in the Far East when Hollywood glamorized the fighting techniques with a string of low budget but successful movies. Although highly fictionalized, they found an eager audience in the western world. We westerners took an immediate shine to the seemingly indestructible karate practitioner as portrayed in the movies. He was independent, quiet spoken, self-confident, fearless, and capable of defeating a veritable army almost singlehandedly. Karate schools, called "Dojos" sprang up in cities across the U.S., and hundreds of thousands of Americans began their quest for the coveted "Black Belt," worn only by the martial arts Master. From there it wasn't long before the martial arts began seeping into the Christian church. Sadly, it's been the habit of the church to adopt the fads of the world, and thus, many ministries were soon teaching judo instead of Jesus and holding courses in every conceivable form of the martial arts.

Recently, several large specialized ministries have appeared, especially featuring the martial arts and strong man stunts. The average service held by these "Christian karate" teams has them breaking bricks, boards, baseball bats, and huge blocks of ice with their heads, feet, and hands. Phone books and handcuffs are ripped apart, and other things usually associated with Eastern Mysticism and the occult (such as nail beds and walking on hot coals) are employed in a spectacular display of strength and skill.

Ministers around the world have invited these karate teams to hold crusades in their churches, knowing that they will draw a capacity crowd that can then be told the good news of Jesus Christ. While I do not doubt the good intentions and sincerity of these men, sincerity is not the issue here. Truth is. And the former is never a substitute for the latter. So while the motivation behind such performances may be earnest, in viewing them, the Bible believer is eventually forced to question whether such displays are biblical. We know they are popular, but are they compatible with Christianity? More to the point, is a martial arts demonstration a scriptural platform from which to preach Christ? While one may argue that Christ can be preached from any platform, we must also bear in mind that the method we employ affects the message we preach. For instance, how can someone **preach** "turn the other cheek" when he's **teaching** self-defense? And how can one preach "love your enemies" while teaching you how to hurt them? You see, when the method contradicts the message, it destroys credibility. And seeing phone books ripped apart by a scantily clad muscleman, who bobs his head up and down, gathering momentum and mental strength as he prepares to crash his head into a thousand pound block of ice, can't possibly prepare the heart for a message about a meek Savior who extolled humility and scorned self-exaltation. While such stunts might attract an impressionable group of young people to sign up for a karate class, it is difficult to see how it will cause them to want to enroll in a Sunday School class.

Please do not misunderstand. This is not an outsider's polemic against something I know not of. I was once among the millions of Americans who sought the black belt, and I dedicated almost five years of my life to its pursuit. Then, something (someone)

intervened. Christ! When I received Christ, no one had to tell me that karate was wrong or unchristian, for I knew it automatically! That was almost 20 years ago. Now I am saddened by a generation of Christians who see no conflict between the martial arts and Christ. They naively believe that karate's source can be divorced from its practice. This, as we shall see, is faulty reasoning. The fact is, all of the martial arts were birthed from an anti-Christian womb. That is why their philosophy attacks the teachings of Jesus at every hand, and their practice conflicts with His example. I discovered that the martial arts were not harmless practices, but that grave spiritual dangers lurked in every corridor of their use. The particular style I studied was Korean (hap-ki-do), but all of the styles spring from the same source. Thus, it is out of genuine concern that I feel obligated to make every Christian aware of these spiritual dangers of the martial arts.

### **1. The Martial Arts all originate in false religion.**

Funk & Wagnals says, "The art of karate is more than 1000 years old and originated in the ancient orient, first as monastic training and later as a defense by Chinese peasants against armed bandits."<sup>1</sup>

*Karate* (Japanese, "empty hand") developed much later than its forerunner, the Chinese *Kung Fu* which is more diverse and holds closely to its Buddhist philosophical roots.

Bob Larson, a respected Christian author and researcher says, "The original religious philosophy of kung fu dates back as far as 2696 B.C. where **it was rooted in the occultic forms of divination** known as the *I-Ching* and the "Book of Changes." Lao Tzu, the Chinese sage born in 604 B.C., added further **demonic embellishments**. His teachings were set forth in a 5,280 word manuscript called **Tao te ching**, often called simply the *tao* or *the way*. He taught that salvation could not be found in prayer but rather by the observance of nature, the natural way. With the adoption of Taoism, kung fu developed into **a complex system of occult practices** that included contemplation and breathing exercises. The common doctrine of **ki** made acupuncture an aid in the quest for health in physical development. Eventually, this led into a search for the mysteries of **the alchemy, further tainting kung fu with overtones of demonism**.

"The next development in the history of kung fu took place when a monk named Bodhidharma brought Buddhism to China in the sixth century A.D. When he discovered the monks sleeping during his lectures, he introduced exercises to assist them in meditation. Known as **I-chin Sutura**, it **combined kung fu with philosophical principles of Zen** to develop a highly sophisticated form of weaponless defense. The monks at his Shaolin temple became famous for their savage abilities of defense employed whenever they were attacked in the course of pilgrimages. Eventually two schools of practice evolved: Ch'un Fe (kung fu) based on the hard (external) school of Buddhism and the soft (internal) school of Taoism. As the martial arts spread beyond the monastery to the fields of war, some of the religious flavor was lost. **But the essential undergirding pagan principles have never been completely overshadowed, even unto today.**"<sup>2</sup>

Christians who participate in the martial arts and insist that they do not include any form of occultism in their practice still cannot deny its patently occult roots.

Friend, if a corrupt root cannot produce good fruit (Matt. 7:17-18), how can we possibly believe that the rotten core of occultism lying at the root of the martial arts does not taint and pervert them? The Bible does not tell us to embrace the occult, but to flee from it!

“Let us cast off the works of darkness, and put on the weapons of the light” (Rom. 13:12 Literal Translation).

**2. The Martial Arts all have an underlying occult philosophy.** In the martial arts, the practitioner exercises “mind over matter” and through meditation taps into a consciousness of greater power. Surprisingly, many Christians miss the connection between karate and the occult. They see it as mere physical exercise but are blinded to its spiritual and philosophical aspects, all born of the ancient Orient.

### **Mind over Matter**

The proper frame of mind is essential to karate practice. In order to break boards, one must *focus (kime)*, that is, he must see *through* the boards, *see* his fist emerging through the other side of them. This is the occultic practice of *visualization*, and *mind over matter*. The same is true for shattering bricks or ice. He must empty his mind of the thought of either pain or failure, and concentrate all of the energy of his body on a specific target. In entering such a mental state, the practitioner, willingly or not, has crossed over into the sinister realm of the occult.

Masutatsu Oyama, one of the world’s most renowned karate experts said, “Always more vital to karate than techniques or strength is **the spiritual element** that lets you move and act with complete freedom. In striving to enter the proper frame of mind **Zen meditation is of great importance**. Though we say that **this meditation involves a state of impassivity and complete lack of thought**, we mean that through meditation we can overcome emotion and thinking and give freer reign to our innate abilities than ever before. **The Zen state** of selflessness is the same condition of disregard for selfish thoughts and concern for personal welfare that the artist experiences in the heat of creation. **The man who wants to walk the way of karate cannot afford to neglect Zen and spiritual training.**”<sup>3</sup>

As Oyama said, Zen (occultism) is an essential ingredient in karate. In fact, it is precisely this occult connection through which the karate master derives his uncanny powers, such as: catching bullets between his teeth, pulling punches short of striking the body (with the effect still felt), exercising psychokinetic powers (i.e., moving objects by mental force alone), etc.

Furthermore, Oyama said, “Though it seems impossible, with karate you can actually snap off the top of a beer bottle with your bare knife hand. Mastering the fundamentals and unflagging *constant daily spiritual and bodily training* will make the impossible possible for anyone. Certainly breaking the neck of the beer bottle off and leaving the bottle standing is difficult, but constant karate training can help you develop speed and strength that surpass common sense.”

Oyama has also engaged in unarmed battle with bulls. In his lifetime, he dealt sudden death to three of them, and broke the horns off 48 others! Obviously, such amazing feats of strength spring from no mere human source.

Furthermore, there is a form of divination (fortune telling, or knowledge of future events) that begins to operate in those who advance in karate disciplines. Hidetaka Nishiyama and Richard C. Brown, in their book *KARATE, The Art of Empty Hand Fighting* said,

“At an advanced level, it is even possible for a karate expert to sense the movements of his opponent before they take place.”

Though such divining is not uncommon in any practice of occultism, any manner of it is not only forbidden by God, but is an abomination to him (cf. Lev.19:26; Deut.18:10; Isa.19:3; Acts16:16).

Thus, to deny an occult source and presence in karate is to deny the obvious.

Additionally, **martial arts practitioners traffic in other aspects of pagan/idolatrous religions**, i.e; walking on hot coals, lying on nail beds, etc., which practices are linked to Buddhism and Hinduism, not Christianity.

Even the term *Martial Arts* itself denotes the arts of war, deriving from “Mars” the ancient Roman god of war. Thus, its very title presupposes violence and aggression. How can a disciple of Christ also practice the disciplines of the ancient, pagan god of war? And how can one who practices Christianity also practice blatant occultism? Scripture declares:

“Ye cannot drink of the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord’s table, and of the table of devils” (1 Cor.10:21).

### **3. The concept of self-defense is itself both unscriptural and anti-christian.**

Some believers may argue this point, considering self-defense both justifiable and “Christian.” But even they must realize that the violent spirit of karate is neither!

A. It violates the Golden Rule, Matt.7:12.

B. It contradicts the direct commands of Jesus. For instance, He said:

- 1) love your enemies (Matt.5:44)
- 2) turn the other cheek (Matt.5:39)
- 3) resist not evil (Matt.5:39)
- 4) bless them that curse you (Matt.5:44)
- 5) do good to them that hate you (Matt.5:44), etc.

In fact, the alert reader will at once realize that both in practice and philosophy, the martial arts directly violates not only all of the aforementioned, plus at least half of the principles in the Lord’s Sermon on the Mount; i.e., being merciful (Matt.5:5); being pure in heart (5:8); being a peacemaker (5:9); etc.

And how do the following statements of Christ line up with the practice of the martial arts:

“Listen, all of you. Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you. Pray for the happiness of those who curse you; implore God’s blessings on those who hurt you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, let him slap the other too! If someone demands your coat, give him your shirt besides” (Luke 6:27-29).

Without a doubt these are hard sayings, but this is how Christ calls His followers to live. Is this the philosophy you will learn in karate? Turning your cheek, or kicking your adversary's cheek? Surrendering your goods to the robber, or harming the robber if you can? After all, did Jesus teach and set an example of self denial, or self-defense?

**4. The Martial Arts glorify the flesh**, by involving bodybuilding and the entire body-worship scene. A few pertinent questions are in order here. If we dedicate ourselves to diligent body-building, will our great physique draw the lost to Christ? If so, then do men of greater stature, like Goliath, who follow false religions, have a distinct advantage over Christians of smaller size? Will their huge size enable them to convert more to their religion than we can to ours, simply because they are bigger than we are? Was then the apostle Paul's ministry a complete failure because he was short?<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, how is Christ glorified by stunts of physical strength? No one in history was stronger than Samson, yet even his mightiest feats of strength did not result in the conversion of a single Philistine. He tore off not mere handcuffs, but the gigantic gates of Gaza, laid them on his shoulders and deposited them on a hilltop miles away! Yet even this feat did not bring a single Philistine to repentance and faith in the God of Israel! This being true, how are we to believe that kicking a few bricks and breaking a few boards will somehow cause wholesale repentance among the unsaved?

#### **“He must Increase....”**

Let's be brutally honest. Who is *increasing* through martial arts and body-building demonstrations? Isn't it the karate practitioner who is attracting all of the attention, praise and admiration as he grunts and kicks, jumps and breaks boards and bricks? Isn't it the strongman who rips apart phone books, and snaps baseball bats who is admired, and not Jesus? And isn't it possible that impressionable young people go home committing the sin that Jude condemns in Jude 16:

“having men's persons in admiration....”

Is Christ displaced to the far background while MEN take center stage in these demonstrations? Is the eternal principle of John 3:30 directly violated? John the Baptist said “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

But how can Jesus increase at the same time MEN increase? How does the muscleman *decrease* while strutting his stuff across a stage? Isn't it obvious that such displays glorify the creature rather than the creator?

#### **Our Only Glory in the Cross**

According to the Apostle Paul, the only glory we should have is in the cross of Christ (Gal.6:14), not in our own power, ability or physique.

If feats of strength were so effective a means of reaching the lost, then why can't we find even one remote reference to Paul, Barnabas, Silas or Timothy ever using them in any of their three missionary journeys? Seriously, beloved, can one even imagine Paul on a stage at Phillipi clapping while some Macedonian muscleman breaks a block of ice with his head? That's not the kind of power Paul was interested in. Indeed, had he relied on that kind of power, he would have had no power to look the devil in the eye and say “I

command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” (Acts 16:18). No, the power Paul enjoyed and the power employed by the martial artists are mutually exclusive and God’s power will not be seen as long as man’s is in the spotlight.

### **A Stumbling Block**

Worse yet, it is a stumbling block cast before the young and vulnerable. Jesus warned:

“But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of offenses! for it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh” (Matt. 18: 6-7).

Those who promote the martial arts in spite of its inherent occultism, endanger the very souls of young and tender Christians. Every stream of the martial arts flows from the same polluted river-occultism. To downplay this occult connection, or worse yet, to deny it altogether while at the same time promoting the Martial Arts, is to “throw the Christians to the lions.” Innocent young believers are sucked under in the deep undercurrents of the Buddhist and Hindu spirituality that permeates the martial arts, and many of them never resurface. They become prey, and the Church or individual Christian who initiated them into the martial arts becomes guilty of their blood, and responsible for their deception. God will hold them accountable!

### **The Weapons of Our Warfare**

Scripture declares that the Christian’s weapons are not carnal (cf. 2 Cor.10:4; Eph.6:10-18). That is, they are not fleshly, tangible or material. Since our warfare is a spiritual one, against a spiritual adversary (the devil, cf. 1 Pet.5:8-9), then obviously the weapons with which we fight and resist must be a spiritual and not carnal or fleshly nature. Our weapons are the **spiritual weapons** of praise, prayer, faith, the Word of God, the blood of Jesus, and the name of Jesus. The martial arts, contrarily, make *fleshly* weapons of the head, feet and hands. Furthermore, employing the martial arts against another person overlooks the fact that our true foes are not human, but spiritual. Thus, the martial arts are not only occult, they are carnal. They are a carnal means to a carnal end, and they gender carnality, such as vanity, pride, strife, self-confidence, and vainglory. In fact, we can state unequivocally that virtually every aspect of the martial arts is either carnal or occult. For instance:

\* *The karate yell* employed by the practitioner before striking his victim is intended to instill fear. That is not only carnal, it is diabolical, “for God hath not given us the spirit of fear...” (2 Tim.1:7). If fear is a “spirit,” and if it’s not from God, then it can only be demonic.

\* *The karate symbol* (present in almost every stream of the martial arts) is the “yin-yang,” the ancient religious (occult) symbol of contrasts, good and evil, light and darkness, right and wrong.

\* *Martial arts prowess* is carnal at best, demonic at worst, and

\* *The martial arts philosophy* is predominately spiritual, borrowed from anti-christian religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism.

Thus in philosophy and in practice, the martial arts are not only occult, they are CARNAL! The Bible warns,

“to be carnally minded is death...” (Rom.8:6).

**5. By their fruits you shall know them.** While those who promote the Christian karate teams cite their bountiful “fruit” as evidence of their legitimacy, a careful scrutiny of this so-called fruit is in order. Much of the time, what is proclaimed to be genuine, God ordained fruit is really the waxy, artificial department store variety. For instance, one church hosted a well known karate-ministry, and boasted that their community’s entire public school football team was converted through the martial arts demonstration. However, none of those converts ever as much as visited the church that hosted the conference, and no evidence of fruit has been noted by anyone knowing the football team. On the other hand, the fruit that **has** been observed after such crusades and in the lives of Christians who take martial arts lessons includes:

\* *Children kicking and punching their brothers and sisters.*

\* *A new interest in violence* in Christian homes, i.e, violent toys, returning to violent movies, and even a desire to inflict violence upon others. With the learning of the martial arts comes the longing to use it.

\* *Children getting into fights*, at school, in the neighborhood, etc. Karate students often develop a sense of “cockiness” and an inflated sense of their self-defense ability which can lead to trouble. Fights they formerly would have avoided or walked away from (which is the true Christian pattern), they now engage in. More than a few “six month karate experts” have discovered too late that they know just enough karate to get hurt. In spite of the what the movies show, today’s violent street toughs are not likely to be defeated by karate. They have fought many times before, and yes, they’ve even fought “karate” men before, so they won’t scare with some stance or yell. In fact, in many cities, jumping into a karate stance will almost guarantee a fusillade of bullets. Karate offers little defense against automatic weapons.

Officially, school is still out on whether those who study the martial arts get into more fights than those who don’t, but the fact seems likely.

\* *Legitimizing the occult.* It is always wrong to use occult practices in church for it legitimizes them in the minds of the impressionable. If the martial arts are acceptable, so are their attending elements: occult meditation, fire-walking, employing Hindu nail-beds, etc. Unfortunately, the martial arts are simply another form of Eastern mysticism that has crept into the Christian church along with other New Age practices and beliefs.

\* *Paranoia.* Speaking from experience, many karate students soon exhibit the exact opposite of that which Jesus promised his disciples. Instead of enjoying peace, calm, love and joy, they are consumed with fear, imagining everyone as their potential enemy. This can and does ferment to the point of paranoia.

### **Important Questions to Consider**

Does the end really justify the means? Or, do the means determine the end?

Is filling our church auditorium with people a pure enough motive, regardless of the message they see and hear? Did Jesus seek only to draw large crowds? Obviously, the answer is **No**. Several times, after performing actual miracles (not mere strong man stunts) he even told people not to tell others. Remember, many of the greatest miracles were done in relatively private settings, or before only a small number. He walked on water in a solitary place, before only a few, and when he turned water into wine, no one

but the servers knew it! There was no big demonstration, and no call for all to “come see signs and wonders.” Though some of the Lord’s healings were done in public, many of them were performed in relative privacy (i.e. healing of Jairus’ daughter, deliverance of Gaderene, etc.) The fact is, when the biggest crowds were present, he would usually teach them, not demonstrate what he could do. How unlike today’s cheap, shallow, circus-like karate demonstrations for Christ.

**What about martial arts as exercise?** Many Christians have been seduced by the exercise aspect of karate, yoga, etc. But where will it lead? Eventually, those who embark on the karate journey will inevitable be overcome by the spiritual aspects of it as well. The two sides of karate, the physical and the spiritual, are so closely intertwined as to make them inseparable. To explore the one is to discover the other. There are enough non-occultic forms of exercise to take advantage of so as to leave us without excuse here.

### **In conclusion**

The whole concept and practice of the martial arts contradicts Christianity. It is at once, occult, fleshly, man serving, and Christ denying. It is, in fact, **anti-christian** in spirit, philosophy, and practice. Smashing bricks and breaking boards opposes the example of Christ. The Bible says of Him,

“He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break” (Isa. 42:2-3).

Worse yet, smashing ones enemies opposes the plain teaching of Christ (cf. Matt. 5:39,44; 7:12, etc.).

The ultimate goal of karate is not merely physical, but spiritual enlightenment-occultism! It is a veritable “spider’s web”, seeking to ensnare the unwary, the ignorant, and the self-confident who believe they can dabble in the devil’s web (occultism) and not become his prey.

Dear reader, please consider these warnings, and remember the Apostle Paul’s admonishing.... “lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor.2:11).

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<sup>1</sup> Funk and Wagnals New Encyclopedia, Vol.14, p333

<sup>2</sup> Bob Larson SPEAKS OUT, Martial Arts

<sup>3</sup> Masutatsu Oyama, WHAT IS KARATE, Japan Publications, Tokyo, 1966

<sup>4</sup> “Paul” Greek *Paulos*, from Latin *Paulis*, meaning “little.” According to tradition, Paul was short of stature.

Russell K. Tardo, Th.B, M.Min, D.Min, is the pastor of Faithful Word Assembly, a Full Gospel, non-denominational church located in Kenner, Louisiana.

