

International Society of Deliverance Ministers

ISDM Occasional Bulletin

www.deliveranceministers.org
No 4

October 26 , 2006

Martial Arts: Does it have any place in the Church?

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October 13, 2006

More and more the martial arts in various forms are being introduced and accepted into the Christian church, especially in the last 10 years. It has come in under the guise of evangelism, self-defense, or simply physical fitness through individuals who usually have good intentions, but lack knowledge and discernment about what is behind every form of martial arts.

Does it have any place in the church? Is there any place for it in a Christian's life? Is there anything about the martial arts that is Christlike? What is the scriptural basis for bringing it into the church? Some might quote the Apostle Paul from 1 Cor. 9:22 ". . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some." Well, does this mean I become a drug user or a prostitute in order to win them to the Lord? I don't think this is what the Apostle Paul meant. For he went on to say in Romans 12:2 that we're not to be conformed to this world and in 2 Cor. 6:17 that we are to come out from among those in the world (in the way we operate and conduct ourselves). In every area we compromise with truth, we give the devil an opening.

In 1961 (about 10 years before I was born again) I began a journey of involvement in the martial arts that would span many years. The Lord has completely delivered me out, but I want to share what I learned along the way.

When I was 21 years old, I had just been freshly discharged from the U. S. Marine Corp. I had had a little training in the martial arts in the Marines, just enough to get me hooked. Their training methods for doing hand-to-hand combat included a form of martial arts (ju-jitsu) and it was while training there that I began to excel and

enjoy it. I liked it – it gave me a sense of power – and I wanted more.

Just to back track a little, when I was growing up I found I was often bullied and pushed around by older boys, including my older brothers. When I was about 12 or 13, I vowed “No one is going to push me around anymore”! I was determined to use whatever means it took to prevent that from happening! I believe that “inner vow” set me up for my martial arts involvement later on. Many people enroll in the martial arts (or enroll their children) in order to protect themselves, especially as we see our world becoming more and more violent.

So, within weeks of my discharge from the USMC, I joined an inter-city dojo club that had just opened in St. Louis. Martial arts here in the U. S. was pretty scarce back in those days. Now, it is everywhere, even in the church. How did it get this far? We easily understand it being in the world, but how did it get in the church?

My training began in St. Louis, but then I moved to Chicago. There I began to train under world-class Japanese instructors in shotokan karate. I thought the Marine Corp was tough, but these guys were tougher and meaner! I was afraid of these guys when I first walked in – a fear gripped me that I had never experienced before, but at the same time, there was an allure that drew me to them!

As I began to train under them, there was a certain ritual they followed at the beginning and the end of every class. This ritual was to first kneel down with our legs crossed behind us, sitting back on our feet, hands on our thighs. Then, we were told to “close our eyes and meditate, clearing the mind”. After three or four minutes, we bowed our heads all the way to the floor, paying homage to show respect to the master (the instructor). In essence, I now know it was an act of devotion and worship. I idolized my sensei, as he was called. This I did thousands of times and martial arts became my god.

I became a black belt in 11 months, which astonished everyone. I was promoted because of my determination and the strength of my spirit and aggressiveness. My promotion came from the top Japanese master in the world, Master Nakiyama, who was visiting Chicago at the time. Of course, this encouraged me to go further.

I began to train every day, blisters and all. I soon became an instructor and was asked to be in charge of another dojo in the Chicago area. A few years later, I moved back to St. Louis and there I opened my own dojo. Later I began to teach a course in martial arts in several universities as an adjunct professor. I continued to get advanced training myself, which intensified my passion to be promoted and to gain even more knowledge of the martial arts. Little did I know I had also opened myself up to a host of demons, and I would later need deliverance.

In 1971, I was sitting in my blue leather recliner, reading Hal Lindsey’s “The Late Great Planet Earth”. At one point in the book, I asked Jesus into my heart and He

came, forgave me, and filled me with the Holy Spirit. Because my experience was not in a church, and because of my background, I thought I had had a great enlightenment such as many of the masters had been telling me I needed. But, at the same time, I knew in my heart, this was different. My students, as well as others, sensed something had happened to me. I wanted to talk about the things of God, but no one wanted to hear it.

About a year later, I heard the Lord saying, "Give it up. I want you out of it." So, I walked away from the martial arts. Ironically, about two years after I gave it up in obedience to the Lord, an associate pastor from the church I was now a part of, came to me and asked me to start up a class in the church on self-defense. I balked at first because I did not think that this violent sport belonged in the church. But, under the guise of self-defense, it sounded like a good thing that might benefit people, and after all, he was a leader in the church! He was fascinated by the martial arts. Because I was still a baby Christian, I just assumed because he was a leader in the church, as well as a professor in college, it must be OK.

So. . . I got back into it. I bought the lie that maybe God had said I had been out of it long enough and now I could go back into it, apply Christian principles in teaching it, and everyone could benefit from my expertise and knowledge. After all, we were teaching people how to protect themselves against violence. It was also going to be used as an evangelistic tool, whereby we were hoping people would participate, and through that participation, we could minister the gospel to them somewhat indirectly. We always had prayer before and after each session, as well as a short Bible study.

Over a short time, it wasn't enough just to teach a few basic self-defense techniques. It escalated into full-blown karate training for those who wanted more. Of course, I did it without the Japanese rituals and harshness that I had been trained under. It was now "Christian martial arts", or so I thought. Once again I was deceived because I believed the lie, and so was the elder who had approached me on this subject. In retrospect, I don't know how I thought I could teach a very violent sport in a non-violent way. I was teaching people how to do great bodily harm to another human being. The problem is, at some point early on, the training crosses the line from self-defense to "offense".

The other problem, as I see it, is that many people in the Christian church don't know about, nor do they walk in, the kind of spiritual authority that releases a power far greater than any martial arts power! The power we have in the name of Jesus far surpasses all other power. When we begin to walk in that kind of power and authority, we won't need "self defense" anymore.

Back to my story. What were the spiritual consequences in the church when the door was opened to martial arts?

I began to see the same things with the people I was training in church that I had seen in the secular arena – pride (superiority), violence, adultery, fornication, drugs, and the like. I didn't make the connection that it was because of the evil demonic influence behind the martial arts, that this had opened a huge door into the church that had allowed the enemy access to people's lives. I continued, in my own deception, thinking I could minister to these people. Was I ever wrong!

The church thought it was a great outreach because people from the outside I had had connections with before began to come to these classes. Most of these people, however, never attended a regular church service, so it really didn't serve the purpose of being the evangelistic outreach it was envisioned to be.

The church began to decline. The associate pastor who had suggested I bring martial arts into the church eventually fell into adultery and thievery. Turmoil and division came into the church. The leaders were busy "putting out fires" here and there because many things began to go awry and they didn't know why. Was it all because of the martial arts? Probably not, but I do know it was a contributor to the demise I began to see.

I knew when I got saved, God had called me to be an evangelist. During this time, I began to minister in prisons. Having a martial arts background was a drawing card that brought many in who would have never attended a regular chapel service. I saw thousands come to the Lord in these meetings. I ministered in prisons all over the country. I also ministered in colleges in the same way, doing a short martial arts demo of breaking some concrete blocks, and then I shared Jesus. There were many times when every person in attendance made an outward commitment to follow the Lord.

The Lord used me for His glory in spite of the deception the enemy still had in that area of my life. You may ask "How could that be?" I've asked that question, too. I believe it was because my heart was for lost souls and the anointing and the call on my life to be an evangelist had never been removed. God knew I would eventually come all the way out!

The enemy of our soul has been very busy introducing all versions of the martial arts into Western society for many years. The way he promotes are many and varied.

Some of his enticements are:

- Self-defense – we're not counting on the Lord for safety, we're now counting on our own ability to protect and defend ourselves.
- A way of overcoming fear – because violence is increasing everywhere in the world, even many born again believers are looking for ways to overcome

their fears. But the Word of God says God has not given us a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7).

- A way of building self-confidence – rather than allowing the Lord to become our confidence.
- Physical fitness – although it does help a person become fit, there are many other ways of becoming fit other than opening a door for the enemy to have access to one's life. One of the drawbacks is, that over time, it can cause great damage to one's body in the wear and tear of the repetitive unnatural body movements.
- Sports, or competition, especially parents wanting to live vicariously through their children. We see it involving younger and younger children. There are plenty of other sports our children can be involved in that don't have an occult background, and that don't teach its participants to maim or kill.
- To gain power – our only source of power should be Jesus Christ and our churches should be full of His power.
- To imitate movie heroes, such as Chuck Norris, David Carradine of Kung Fu fame, Bruce Lee, and others. Are we to imitate movie heroes, or are we to imitate Christ?

Martial arts is a very old occult practice that has recently been cleverly disguised and re-packaged, and has gone through a metamorphosis, to make it more palatable to Western society. The occult is rooted and prevalent in all forms of martial arts, whether Japanese, Chinese, or Korean. If you study the history, you will find it goes back thousands of years. The original religious philosophy of kung fu in China, for example, dates back as far as 2696 BC where it was rooted in occultic forms of divination and was intertwined with the false religion of Taoism. In Japan, it was intertwined with Zen Buddhism. In essence, martial arts spread from China to Japan to Korea and then elsewhere, where it was given different names and developed into various styles. But the spiritual DNA of all of them comes from an evil root. If something has an evil root, how can it bear righteous fruit?

A lack of knowledge (ignorance of what's behind it) has allowed it into many churches and religious organizations including YMCA's. Today, it has become very popular. The enemy is also heavily promoting it in our society in general, hoping to draw in many Christians and unbelievers alike, in order to bring destruction into that person's life.

I mentioned earlier that my involvement in the martial arts before I became a Christian allowed a wide open door to the enemy of my soul – a demonic seed was planted. After the Lord impressed on me to give up the martial arts, it became very

apparent to me that I needed deliverance, especially from a strong spirit of violence. I went to people I knew in the church and told them I needed help.

That same day, a group of six of them agreed to take me through deliverance at the church. These six people barely knew what to do. That in itself could have cost me my life, because the whole time they were trying to cast this demon out, it was telling me it was going to kill me by running my head into the concrete block wall of the room we were in.

That demon screamed aloud, "My name is violence and I'm going to get you all!" I was terrified and they were, too. I said to them, "Don't let me go or it will kill me." So they, in their physical strength (a combined weight of roughly 1200 lbs.) tried to hold me down. The strength of that demon brought them all off the floor.

As I look back on it now, I see how we all could have been injured or worse if not for the grace of God -- a good reason not to go into the ministry of deliverance if you don't have proper training and know your authority! One of them had the good sense to use the name of Jesus. She quietly said "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus". The demon did leave and no one was hurt.

Does martial arts have any place in the church? Does it have a place in the life of a born again believer? I believe without question it is an open door to the enemy of our soul and it gives him **a legal right to one's life**.

In my own life, I can see how the enemy not only established a stronghold in my life, but through it, he tried to give me a counterfeit identity – to be "somebody" in his kingdom. When I became a born again believer, I now had a new identity in Christ, but the enemy tried to bring back his "counterfeit". It took years to destroy that counterfeit identity, because it was so entrenched in my life.

It took time for the lies to be completely dismantled. My wife and I went to the Philippines in 2001 to do a deliverance conference. While in a hotel room, before the conference began, the Lord revealed to me that I had never renounced my involvement in the martial arts. He knew I needed to do this because some of the people at the conference were going to be delivered from their own involvement in the martial arts. He didn't want anything the "accuser of the brethren" could use against me.

A few months later, on October 31st, the Holy Spirit said to me, "How long are you going to keep your gi (karate uniform and black belt) and all your medals?" (I had been a five-time national champion in earlier years.) These medals were symbolic of having earned national status and recognition. I knew what the Lord was saying because He had whispered that question before from time to time. This time was different – He was loud and clear. So, on that very morning, I took my uniform, my belt, and my medals out to our back yard (in the woods) and burned all of it, just

like the new believers did in Acts 19:19.

When we have a false identity already entrenched in our lives, sometimes it takes awhile to remove that false identity completely, and become what God wants us to be – which is Christlike in every way! Beating up another person is not a “fruit of the Spirit”. Bowing down to anyone other than God is idolatry. Opening up our minds to anything that is rooted in the occult gives the enemy access to our lives. When we bring it into our churches, it gives the enemy access to our church, to bring in his junk - pride, intimidation, violence, deception, error, self-sufficiency, even a spirit of murder.

Isn't it interesting that when we come to Christ, we all have a sinful “black” nature? His blood cleanses us and makes us white as snow. But, when we start out in any martial arts, we start with a “white belt” (innocent) and end up (for those who stay in it) with a “black belt”, polluted because of our newfound power.

2 Cor. 6:14-18 says, “. . .For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? . . . And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God and they shall be My people. Therefore, come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you and you shall be my sons and daughters says the Lord Almighty.”

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