



## Fulfilling The Great Commission Through the Martial Arts

By: Rev. John L. Terry, III

December 3, 2008

Matthew 28:18-20: <sup>18</sup> *Jesus came and told his disciples, "I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. <sup>19</sup> Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. <sup>20</sup> Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Jesus final command to his disciples, and to those of us who are believers in Him is two-fold. Commonly called "The Great Commission", Christ told those who would follow Him they were expected to actively engage in a two-pronged sharing of their faith:

1. Go and make disciples
2. Teach them to obey the commands He gave His followers

In order to fulfill the first of the two directives of Christ, we are instructed to go. According to the Random House 2006 unabridged edition of the dictionary, the word "GO" translates "*move or proceed, to keep or be in motion, to be known, or to reach, extend or give access to...*"

In terms of the sharing of our faith, we are admonished by Scripture to GO...to move or proceed toward those who need to hear the Good News of Christ. We are not only challenged to share our faith as a one-time event, but to actively share our faith as a part of our regular day-to-day activities. To GO means that we are to be known by both our words and our deeds as a follower of Christ, as we are to mirror His life and character traits in our conduct (both private and public). We are admonished to GO...to reach out to those who are lost and extend an opportunity to hear the Good News and respond; to give them a chance to access the goodness of God as we share what Christ has done.

But the directive doesn't end with the sharing of our faith. Christ's final admonition went beyond just bringing people into the Kingdom of God through a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and His finished work on the cross. We (as believers) are instructed to disciple these new believers in all the commands that Christ has left for us.

According to the Random House 2006 unabridged edition of the dictionary, the word DISCIPLE means "*a person who is a pupil or an adherent of the doctrines of another*" or "*to teach or train another*". So as followers of Christ, we are given the task not only to lead the lost to a saving knowledge of Jesus but to also see that they become pupils or adherents (followers) of the doctrines (teaching) of Christ.

So the Great Commission is more than just bringing people to the understanding they are sinners in need of a Savior, and this sin has broken fellowship with God. It is more than just helping them understand the only way to restore right relationship with a holy God is through acceptance of the substitutionary work of Christ through His death on the cross. It is more than just leading them in a "Sinner's Prayer".



The Great Commission is not fulfilled until we take those individuals we have helped bring into the family of God and teach (or train) them to become lifelong students of Christ. Paul told his followers in Philippians 3:17 to “*pattern your lives after mine, and learn from those who follow our example...*” He also told his followers in 1 Corinthians 11:1 “*and you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ...*”

That means that those of us who call ourselves Christians need to know what it means to be a follower of Christ, and that can only come through personal study of God’s word, the Bible. Far too many believers in Christ are not students of His word, and lack sufficient knowledge of what His word says so they can adequately and accurately both live out and share His message in our conduct and behavior.

The tenants of martial arts training advocate discipline and a lifelong commitment to study and advance both in knowledge and understanding of the arts. As followers of Christ, and martial arts practitioners, our study of God’s word (and its practical application in our daily lives) should be as much a part of our daily routine as practicing kata, technique, self-defense, or any other aspect of our art.

As we mature and grow along the martial way, we advance in rank and find ourselves in positions of authority or as a role model for others to follow. Lower ranked students typically line up behind the higher ranked students in class so they have a model (an example) to emulate. Those who have matured in the arts are often used to help “teach and train” (disciple) others so they can advance in their given style or system.

We who are practitioners of the martial arts see the Great Commission played out in the study of our style or system, yet how often do we make the spiritual connection to our calling as disciples (practitioners of Christianity) and our responsibility to be just as diligent with our study of our Master (Jesus Christ) and His teachings as we are with those of our martial arts style?

Faith-based martial arts practitioners should be at the forefront of discipleship, both in matters of eternal consequence as well as in the training and teaching of our style or system. We should be students of the Bible, God’s Holy Word, and be able to teach and train those who join our ranks so they can advance and mature in the art that is Christianity.

In the Japanese arts, the word “DO” means “way or path”. As a karateka, we are to travel along the path as a lifelong endeavor, ever learning, ever maturing, ever improving in our chosen art. We can be ex-football players, ex-basketball players, or ex-sports athletes. But a true martial arts practitioner is never an “ex” as a true martial artist has committed his or her life to a lifestyle and a calling that demands we live our lives a certain way.

Even more so should those of us who call ourselves Christians understand this too is a lifelong endeavor of learning; it is a commitment to live our lives in a certain way and to be ever studying, ever learning, ever maturing, ever improving in our chosen path, so that we can effectively emulate that life as an example to others.



As martial arts practitioners, our chosen field of study creates a dynamic parallel by which we can share the love and life of Christ with others, and as a means to both evangelize and disciple others. The core tenants of the martial arts have foundational parallels with those of Christianity. Discipline, honor, self-sacrifice, respect, and integrity are concepts that are well understood in the arts, and create dynamic opportunities (and great illustrations) to point others to Christ and teach and train them in His teachings and commands.

As martial arts instructors, we are in a unique position to use our given art to introduce the life of Christ to our students, and to use the core tenants of the martial arts to help students grasp spiritual truths from God's word, and advance their knowledge and understanding of how to live a life that is pleasing to God, and to share that life with others. In doing so, we have a unique opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission in the lives of our students...and empower them to do likewise in their sphere of influence at work, school, home, or in their local community.