



Be Strong In The Lord!

By

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Spiritual Strength

Where do we get spiritual strength? The Apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Ephesian Christians.

“Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” Ephesians 6:14-16

Our success in life depends to a great extent on how we “structure” our thoughts, beliefs and actions. Structuring in martial arts is the idea of how we stand (stances) and move through those stances without losing the “rooting” necessary to defend ourselves against attack successfully. The key to a strong stance is understanding both the purpose and motivation in combination with the elements

we can access and train. (“when in motion one is still rooted” – Five Word Song, p. 28)

Bones, muscles, ligaments, tendons and tissue are elements we are able to access and train in the physical realm. Our stretching routine is part of training our body to stand properly and move through a combination of stances with maximum flexibility and strength – both internal and external. We learn the “truth” about the physical realm we live in and how to best use the tools God has given us.

As important as the physical is to a martial artist, something more important to success is what we **think** and **believe**. We need to think “true” thoughts and believe “true” beliefs. No matter how flexible and strong we may be in the physical realm, the greatest challenges in life are those in the mental and spiritual. Let’s begin with the **mental**.

Yon Ch'uan Martial Arts comes from an old Chinese martial art called *Liu Ho Pa Fa Ch'uan Fa* (also known as Water Boxing). It translates as *Six Combinations Eight Methods Fist Law*. It was a closed internal martial art until Master Instructors like John Chung Li introduced it to the public after moving from China to the United States. Grand Master Li taught Grand Master Robert Xavier who taught Sensei Mark McGee who teaches you. That is called a martial arts “lineage” and is important in understanding the root, trunk and branches of your art.

The first of the six combinations is “The Body Combines With The Mind.” That’s known in Chinese martial arts as Mind-Intent. Grand Master Li, who was a committed Christian, explained it this way:

“Extraneous thoughts should be excluded from the mind and concentration utilized.” Li Tung Fung, John Chung Li, Mark McGee, ed., The Chinese Five Word Song, Fifth Estate Publishing, 2004, p. 22

This idea is similar to *kime* in Karate. *Kime* is the noun form of the verb *kimeru* – “to decide” – and translates as “focus.” When I first learned about *kime* in Karate, my instructor was a Buddhist and emphasized the mental techniques of Zen Buddhism. He was also an atheist, which I also became soon after beginning my training in Karate-Do.

After becoming a Christian, I wanted to find God’s method for thinking and focusing my mind. I learned that God wants us to have a **sound** mind, which works well for a Christian martial artist – “For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” (1 Timothy 1:7) My concept of “focusing” changed from

thinking about nothing (or at the most about myself), to thinking about God. That type of mental focus works well for the Christian martial artist – “You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose mind is stayed on You*, Because he trusts in You.” (Isaiah 26:3)

I struggled with martial arts as a young Christian because of my training in Zen Buddhism. How could I continue to do something with my mind and body that was so tied to my former life as an atheist? I even thought for a time that I might have to quit martial arts because of that tie to Buddhism. However, the Lord introduced me to a Christian youth pastor in 1972 who was a Judo Black Belt. He was also a member of Judo and Karate for Christ (now Karate For Christ International). I began to understand that there was another way for a Christian to train the mind to think. When I read Paul’s letter to the Philippians, I knew I had found a secret to how to “focus” as a Christian martial artist.

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.” Philippians 4:6-9

We exchange anxiety (worry, fear) for dependence on God. We believe God, think about God and thank God, and the peace of God acts as a “guard” around our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. I liked the Greek word for “guard” (*phroureo*) because it was a military term used for

a garrison which would protect against attack. It really does “surpass all understanding.”

How do we ensure that this amazing guardianship continues? Meditate on these things:

- whatever things are true
- whatever things are noble
- whatever things are just
- whatever things are pure
- whatever things are lovely
- whatever things are of good report
- any virtue
- anything praiseworthy

God promises us His peace as we think on these things. Even as we train our body in martial arts, so we must train our mind to believe and trust what God says is true.

If you would like more information about Grace Martial Arts classes in your area, contact Senior Instructor Mark McGee at gracemartialarts1@gmail.com.

Saved and Safe!

“Watch, stand fast in the faith, be brave, be strong. Let all that you do be done with love.” 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

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