



Black Belt Apologetics

By

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Fundamentals

How would you like to get a Black Belt in Apologetics? While that may sound strange, the similarities between faith defense and self defense are important to our understanding of how to be the best Christian apologist we can be.

A Black Belt in martial arts (self defense) relies on four areas of training to defend themselves while protecting others in the physical arena.

1. Fundamentals
2. Forms
3. Fighting
4. Focus

These are the same skills Christian apologists will need to defend themselves while protecting others in the spiritual arena.

The Spiritual Arena

God has not left us to wonder about what's involved in spiritual warfare.

“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.”

Ephesians 6:10-13

The ‘real enemy’ apologists face is not *non-Christians* who oppose them on the college campus or at work. The real enemy is an extremely well-trained and experienced *spiritual army* that calls on tactics developed during thousands of years of fighting a battle that Christians alive today have been fighting for less than a century.

It might seem that the odds of winning spiritual battles are stacked against us, but God has not left us alone to fend for ourselves. He has given us powerful spiritual weapons to wield that are both defensive and offensive.

“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. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints.” Ephesians 6:14-18

Christian apologists must remember that they will overcome because God is fighting the spiritual battle with them.

“You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world.” 1 John 4:4

Standing in the Spiritual Arena

The first lessons in martial arts are aimed at teaching new students how to **stand**. Learning how to strengthen one’s ability to stand properly and powerfully prepares them to move quickly through a series of defensive and offensive stances while remaining rooted to the ground. The purpose is to move opponents while remaining unmoved. It takes time to master the skill of standing, but it is essential to defeating a stronger opponent.

The same is true in the spiritual arena. The first lesson is how to stand – “Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore ...”

Jesus told a crowd of people that they were of their father the devil, saying Satan “does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him.” (John 8:44) That’s important to remember because Satan is our enemy. He does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. What does that tell us? Our stance must be rooted in truth.

The Apostle Paul reminds us that our rejoicing should be “in the truth” (1 Corinthians 13:6) and Jesus said that all truth has its foundation in love for God (Matthew 22:37-38).

Fundamentals in the Spiritual Arena

A Black Belt in martial arts needs a strong grasp on fundamentals in five areas: Escaping, Blocking, Striking, Trapping, and Throwing. They work on these five fundamentals every day for many years to earn a Black Belt and every day for the rest of their life to improve on those basic skills.

A Christian apologist also needs a strong grasp on the spiritual fundamentals in those same areas. Here are some examples of the basics in each category from Scripture:

“... who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” Hebrews 11:33-34

Escaping (Evading)

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God *is* faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear *it*.” 1 Corinthians 10:13

Blocking (Stopping/Redirecting)

“... above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one.” Ephesians 6:16

Striking (Defending)

“But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” 1 Timothy 6:11-12

Trapping (Seizing Control)

“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.” 2 Corinthians 10:4-5

Throwing (Overcoming)

“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” 1 John 5:3-5

These are just some of the examples of the many types of fundamentals that are important for Christian apologists to know and practice in their life and ministry. Becoming a Black Belt in martial arts takes years of focused study and practice. It does not come easy. In fact, the vast majority (more than 90%) of martial students quit before earning their Black Belt. Becoming a Black Belt in apologetics also takes years of focused study and practice. It won't be easy, but the reward is great.

“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” Colossians 3:23-

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Forms

The ‘fundamentals’ of martial arts are taught during the first few years of a student’s quest for a Black Belt. Those fundamentals include basics of *escaping, blocking, striking, trapping* and *throwing*. However, **learning** the fundamentals is just the beginning. Martial artists with decades of experience are still **practicing** those fundamentals because they are the ‘foundation’ of a powerful system of *self defense*.

The same is true in Christian apologetics. Christian apologists **learn** the fundamentals of Christianity during their early years of training, then practice them continually as the foundation of a powerful system of *faith defense*.

The ‘foundation’ of Christian apologetics is the teaching of the apostles and prophets built on Jesus Christ as the **Chief Cornerstone** of the Faith.

“Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.”

Ephesians 2:19-22

No matter how many years we’ve been Christians, we never stop ‘practicing’ the fundamentals that are built on the ‘foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone.’ The elements of those fundamentals include an understanding of thousands of Bible verses and hundreds of spiritual principles explained in God’s Word.

The Pattern We Follow

That brings us to the second area of training in martial arts and apologetics – *Forms*.

Forms in martial arts are pre-arranged **patterns** designed by master instructors to help students move through the fundamentals in a way that demonstrates an effective defense against one or more opponents. Students begin learning forms by closely following the movements of their teacher. Their goal is a precision of movement that emulates the movement of their teacher. This process can take many years to perfect and for good reason. That precision and exactness is passed along from generation to generation so the martial artist holds to the pattern of the **founder** of the ‘art.’ Many of the ‘forms’ taught in martial arts today have histories that span hundreds of years. The objective is to practice those ancient forms in the precise manner they were first taught at the beginning of each martial arts style.

Once a student is able to follow the form(s) to the satisfaction of their instructor, they begin to learn the *meaning* and *application* of each movement in the form. That’s when the form takes on a life of its own and becomes ‘real’ to the student as they use movements from the form to protect against other students who attack them (with and without weapons). The goal is to move quickly, safely, powerfully, efficiently, and effectively in defending themselves and others in their care.

In the Arena of Apologetics

The same is true in learning the ‘art’ of apologetics. The student learns the fundamentals of Christianity from their teachers. Then they learn the ‘patterns’ that Jesus Christ and His apostles established through their lives and teaching and passed along to their students. The goal is to follow each ‘movement’ with spiritual precision. Jesus Christ is the ‘utmost’ example we are to follow as Christians and apologists.

“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.” 1 John 2:6

“For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.” 1 Peter 2:21

Learning *spiritual patterns* in life and apologetics is a process of ‘imitating’ Jesus Christ.

“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” Ephesians 5:1-2

When Jesus ascended to Heaven He ‘gave gifts to men.’ Those gifts include our ‘instructors’ in Christianity who have the responsibility of ‘training’ us in how to serve God faithfully and effectively so each believer is able to speak the truth in love and grow up in all things

“into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” (Ephesians 4:15-16)

This is a great responsibility for both teacher and student. The teacher is responsible to God to accurately demonstrate the ‘Christ-like pattern,’ while the student is responsible to God to follow that pattern and imitate Christ.

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” Philippians 3:17

The Ratio Christi Chapter Director

So what does that mean for a Ratio Christi Chapter Director or anyone involved in leading other ministries? It means students are going to **follow your pattern**. They’re going to want to be *like* you based on your being *like Christ*. Christians in high school and college need strong Christian role models and you are one of those models in their lives. The way you think, talk, act and react are part of the *pattern* they need to see so they can become like Christ. Being ready to give a defense includes both the right *answer* and the right *attitude* (1 Peter. 3:15-16). It is through your good efforts that Christian students learn the apologetic patterns laid down in the Scriptures.

The discipleship model we see in the Gospels is an excellent one for RC chapter directors to follow. Jesus spent time with His young disciples teaching them and allowing them to watch Him as He did

the work of apologetics. Then, the Lord sent them out in pairs and shared in their excitement as they returned to tell Him about their journey to proclaim the Gospel. Jesus used those pairings as an opportunity to deepen the disciples' understanding of the Gospel and the ministry He had called them to do. As the disciples learned the 'what, where, when and how' of ministry, Jesus also helped them understand 'why' He did what He did and why they would need to follow His example.

Jesus left His disciples many patterns to follow in their lives and ministries, but one of the most important is the example Jesus gave them the night before His crucifixion.

“If I then, *your* Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him.” John 13:14-16

May we follow this and every example Christ gave us with both precision and compassion in service to students and faculty on our campuses.



Fighting in the Martial Arts

What should a Christian do if someone throws them to the ground or hits them in the face? Christians don't fight. Right? Well, it depends on what you mean by "fight."

Christian Martial Arts instructors emphasize "defending with compassion." They emphasize to their students how to defuse an argument verbally or escape physically from an attacker. The key is not to get hurt or hurt anybody else. However, if a student can't defuse the situation or escape, what should they do? They are taught to end the confrontation effectively and efficiently. That may mean

blocking the attack and “redirecting” the attacker to the ground or several feet away. It may also mean striking or kicking the attacker to get away.

So, how does a martial arts student learn how to fight? They learn the art of *Kumite*, which means “sparring” or “fighting.” Instructors work with students to move from **Fundamentals** and **Forms** to **Fighting**.

Fighting in the dojo is carefully controlled at first to help keep young students from hurting each other, but training at the Black Belt level is a demonstration of speed, power and accuracy that could defeat one or more attackers in just seconds.

Sounds great for martial arts, but how does that work in the spiritual realm?

Spiritual Fighting

The New Testament word for “contest sparring” is *agonizomai*, which means “struggle, contending, fighting, striving.” It was used for sparring in ancient gymnastic games, fighting with adversaries, struggling with danger or difficulty, and striving to obtain. The Apostle Paul used the word when he told Timothy to “*fight the good fight of faith*” (1 Timothy 6:12) and when he described himself as having “*fought the good fight*” (2 Timothy 4:7).

Paul used a different word for the idea of fighting in Ephesians 6:12 - *“For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.”* The Greek word for ‘wrestle’ is *pale* and is used only once in the New Testament. It translates as “vibrate, shake” and has some similarities to styles of martial arts that use trapping, throwing and choking techniques to force an opponent into submission.

Defeating an opponent in ancient Greek and Roman games combined off-balancing, tripping, throwing, trapping, choking and other submission techniques. Punching and kicking were also used to stun an opponent, which made submission techniques quicker and more effective. Paul used this word for “intense struggle” in the context of spiritual warfare.

First Fight

The best fighters in the physical realm know why they fight AND the best way to win the fight. They know the faster they win a fight, the less chance of serious injury. The same is true for the Christian apologist. The Apostle Paul wrote that unlike people who compete in life for a perishable crown, Christians compete for an *“imperishable crown.”* (1 Corinthians 9:25b)

The first fight an apologist will face is with *themselves* – *“And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things ... But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have*

preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.” (1 Corinthians 9:25a, 27)

The word “temperate” (*egkrateuomai*) in verse 25 is the idea of exercising self-control (dominion from within). The word “subjection” (*doulagogeō*) in verse 27 is the idea of enslaving, subduing, leading into captivity, claiming as one’s own slave.

What Paul told the Corinthians is similar to the martial artist who brings his/her body into subjection through intense training. It is not possible to reach mastery in martial arts without bringing your body into subjection through self-discipline and self-control. The same is true for the apologist. Paul addressed this in his last letter to Timothy – *“For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline.”* (2 Timothy 1:7, NIV)

The Holy Spirit will not lead a Christian to indulge the flesh. Paul wrote - *“those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”* (Galatians 5:24) God’s Spirit living in us will lead us away from indulging the flesh to bearing His fruit in our lives (e.g. love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control). Those are the marks of a powerful spiritual warrior who has disciplined himself/herself and brought their body, mind and spirit “into subjection.”

Second Fight

The second fight an apologist will face is *uncertainty* – “*Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air.*” (1 Corinthians 9:26)

Paul’s idea of “*one who beats the air*” was used of a fighter who practiced punching into the air with no real opponent (shadow boxing) or was unable to land a punch during a real fight. No matter how hard they fought, they were ineffective. Real fights involve real opponents and winning real fights means using techniques the fighter is certain will work.

We have a saying in martial arts – “Do not fear the opponent who knows 10,000 kicks, but fear the opponent who has practiced one kick 10,000 times.” Anyone who has used a specific kick 10,000 times in training and real fights will launch that kick with **certainty**. They have perfected that kick and know exactly how and when to use it for maximum effect.

A Christian who has practiced a solid apologetic argument hundreds or even thousands of times in real discussions with real people will use that argument with **certainty** and maximum effect.

The Best Fighters

The Apostle Paul was quite the spiritual warrior. He knew that fighting spiritual battles was not about conducting warfare in the power of the flesh - *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.”* (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)

The best martial arts fighters know how to maximize their skills to be both effective and efficient. They don't waste time or energy. They fight to win and winning often means enduring. The same is true for the Christian apologist.

“And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.” 1 Corinthians 4:12-13

Apologetists should be ready to fight every day because the enemy is going to bring the fight every day. The best apologetic warriors should be ready to *“suffer for righteousness' sake”* and not fear the enemy's threats or be troubled (1 Peter 3:14). Our work is to sanctify the Lord God in our hearts and be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks us for a reason for the hope that is in us, with meekness and

fear (1 Peter 3:15). We do that best when we are ready to “*fight the good fight of faith.*”



Focus in the Martial Arts

We like to say there are “Four K’s” in Karate, but all must have one. We’ve looked at three of the Four K’s already in this series – *Kihon* (Fundamentals), *Kata* (Forms) and *Kumite* (Fighting) – but there is one more K and we view that in martial arts as most important. It is *Kime* and translates as “focus.” It’s something that a martial arts judge looks for in the eyes of a competitor.

The word *Kime* means “to decide, fix, set” and expresses the total determination of mind and spirit in accomplishing what the mind has set for the body to complete. That might be breaking a concrete block with their fist, defeating a more powerful opponent, drawing a razor-sharp sword from the *saya* (scabbard) to cut an apple in half as it is

thrown at your face, or performing a physically and mentally challenging *Kata* in competition. The competitor's mind is not angry, stressed, upset or anxious. It is tranquil, willing, "focused" on accomplishing the task at hand. Training in *Kime* leads to increased power and speed because the mind is not encumbered by fear or concern. What matters is completing the task quickly, effectively and efficiently.

Spiritual Focus

Christianity's greatest example of spiritual "focus" is Jesus Christ. Jesus was completely focused on completing His Father's will, no matter how physically, mentally or spiritually difficult the challenge. *"Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done."* Luke 22:42

His Father's will was the driving force behind everything Jesus said and did. *"As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me."* John 5:30

Jesus said the same focus is necessary for His followers. *"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."* Matthew 7:21

Paul explained the special focus and determination of Christ's mind, and the importance of every Christian having the same "focus" this way –

"Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross." Philippians 2:5-8

Paul reminded Christians that their greatest goal should be to do God's will and please Him in everything they do.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."
Philippians 2:12-13

Apologetic Focus

Becoming a Black Belt in martial arts means focusing on the "right things" which are part of the moral code of martial arts known as *Bushido*, a code developed by Samurai warriors and passed from generation to generation for centuries. They include Integrity,

Respect, Courage, Honor, Compassion, Honesty and Sincerity, and Duty and Loyalty. *Bushido* is a way of life to a “focused” martial artist.

Becoming a Black Belt in apologetics means focusing on what Jesus Christ determined as “right things” for His disciples. This Christian “code” has been passed down from generation to generation for two millennia. The Code of Christ is His authority, commands and teachings and is a way of life to a “focused” believer. (Matthew 28:18-20)

Where do we begin to know what “right things” are for a Christian?

“If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Colossians 3:1-3

We begin “above” in Heaven even as Jesus taught His disciples to pray: “Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as *it is* in heaven.” (Luke 11:1-2).

Our focus as Christians involved in the lives of young people must be on “things above.” We must be able to point the way for students and professors, and that way is above, where Jesus Christ sits at the right hand of the Father.

Focusing on “things above” means determining to make disciples and *“teaching them to observe all things”* that Jesus has commanded. Our personal focus must first be on obeying God’s will and observing all

things that Jesus has commanded us, then we can lead others to obey God's will and the teachings of our Lord.

The Greek word for "set your mind" is φρονεῖτε and means "to direct the mind to, seek for, care for, think, intellect, judge, have understanding, have affection for." Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not about following the Christian faith blindly. There is no "blind faith" in Christian apologetics. Defending the Christian worldview begins with our submission to the authority of Jesus Christ and continues to the obeying of His commands and teachings.

Focusing on Mighty Things

All Christians should be in agreement that Jesus Christ accomplished the single greatest thing that has ever been done in the history of the world. He died on the Cross for our sins and rose from the dead, *"that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living"* (Romans 14:9). He is the *"propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"* (1 John 2:2). Paul wrote in Ephesians that God accomplished His eternal purpose in *"Christ Jesus our Lord."* It is because of Christ's complete "focus" on accomplishing His Father's will that Christians *"have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him"* (Ephesians 3:11-12).

God also wants to accomplish mighty things in and through us – *"For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high*

thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ” (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

What mighty things does God have in mind for you this year? What mighty things does He want to do for your Ratio Christi chapter, for your community, your church, your family? As we **focus** on God’s will for our lives and ministry, as we focus on those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God, as we focus on accomplishing mighty things for our mighty God, we will see God do what only He can do and what He wants to do for you and the people He has called you to serve. May we all be **Black Belts in Apologetics**.

[This series of articles about Black Belt Apologetics first appeared on the Ratio Christi Website (RatioChristi.org). Mark McGee is a Ratio Christi assistant chapter director at the University of Alabama in Huntsville. He is also a 6th Degree Black Belt and has been teaching for more than 50 years.]

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