

The Cane Fu Defense *Ephesians 6:10-20* | 8/26/2018

When you think about a retirement home or senior center, you probably expect to find a group of seniors hanging out in a common area playing bingo, sipping a cup of tea, reading a large-print book or engaging in a fierce game of checkers. You might be surprised to find, however, that a couple of times a week the dayroom in some of these tranquil places actually transforms into a dojo where a robed sensei pits grandmas and grandpas against one another in simulated combat scenarios. To the outsider, it looks like "Fight Club: Senior Edition."

But to those seniors out on the mat it's an important bit of training for navigating the dangers of the real world. These folks are learning how to use their canes as weapons for defending themselves against potential attackers who might see them as easy marks for theft or assault. While grandma might look helpless and weak leaning on a cane to help her do her grocery shopping, that curved stick can put a young punk down in a heartbeat if she knows how to use it.

An aptly named martial arts instructor named Buck Buckmaster is one of the teachers of "extreme cane defense" or, as some of these ninja nanas call it, "Cane Fu." Buckmaster started teaching these classes for seniors after his own 69-year-old mother was attacked. The seniors learn to be aware of their surroundings and try to avoid putting themselves in vulnerable scenarios, but, if that fails, they also learn how to use their canes to bust shins, crack skulls, hook a neck or poke an attacker in his sensitive areas. I know you're thinking it, so go ahead and sing it: "Everybody Was Cane Fu Fighting!"

While a cane is usually associated with a disability, it's actually one of the most effective and easy-to-use weapons in self-defense. You can carry it anywhere you want, even on an airplane. It's a medical device, so it's always with you and it's always in hand. A gun needs to be pulled from a holster and a knife from a sheath but, as Cane Fu instructor Mark Shuey puts it, "With a cane, you're always locked and loaded." Puts a new spin on Theodore Roosevelt's famous quote, doesn't it? "Speak softly and carry a big stick!"

Speaking of canes and crutches, a lot of people in our world look at people of faith as a bunch of vulnerable and weak people who are easily taken advantage of and aren't strong enough to get by without it. Jesse Ventura, the former professional wrestler who became governor of Minnesota, once said, "Organized religion is a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people who need strength in numbers." Pornographer Larry Flynt agreed, saying, "There's nothing good I can say about [religion]. People use it as a crutch."

How do we respond to such criticism? Like Cane Fu Christians! If faith is a cane or crutch we carry around with us every day because we need it, then it's also a powerful weapon we can use in navigating a world in which evil prowls around like a roaring lion waiting to pounce (1 Peter 5:8). Theological thugs, punk philosophers and Hollywood hoodlums may try to snatch our faith away like grandma's purse, but the Cane Fu Christian knows that he or she has the proper weapon at hand at all times and uses it wisely.

That's the point that Paul makes at the end of his letter to the Ephesians, which most scholars believe was actually a letter to be circulated to different churches in a broad geographical area. Like a good sensei, Paul instructs these churches to avoid the dark corners of pagan philosophy and practice and instead to "live as children of light" who "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (5:8, 11).

But if avoidance doesn't work, they need to be prepared to parry the assault of evil in the form of temptation, doubt and persecution. In chapter 6, Paul holds up a list of virtues that Christians should carry with them and lean on every day -- virtues that are already locked and loaded in the life of the Christian and can double as defensive weapons for defending the faith when the time comes.

Paul uses the image of a Roman soldier's battle dress, or *panoply*, as a metaphor for the "whole armor of God" which can be used to "stand against the wiles of the devil" (6:11). While most of Paul's audience would have been very familiar with the sight of Roman soldiers walking around in full kit, physical armor wasn't something that most of them would have grabbed on their way down to the local market. Still, Paul urges them to put on a defensive mindset and realize that they actually have significant protection at hand.

Paul goes on to list several weapons of the Roman panoply as metaphors for the kind of things Christians should always have at hand. With the exception of the sword, all of these are defensive weapons, designed for protection. A cane doesn't look like much until it is in the hands of a skilled senior, and neither do these virtues until they are employed with wisdom and the striking power of the Holy Spirit.

The "belt of truth," for example, is something common that many of us carry close at hand (v. 14). It is the truth of the gospel that enables us to deflect the various untruths that we are bombarded with every day. When we are immersed in the truth, it leaves no room for the devil to attack (4:27).

The "breastplate of righteousness" protects the heart of the Christian (6:14). One of the ways that criminals often try to lure their elderly victims is by playing on their innate sense of wanting to be "nice." The devil often uses a similar tactic in tempting us toward things that look good and inviting on the outside, but will trap us in the darkness if we're not careful. A deep sense of right and wrong keeps us from giving in to temptation and helps us identify the devil's scams when we see them.

Having the right footwear is also a key to self-defense. It's a lot better to be wearing shoes when confronting an attacker than it is to be wearing flip-flops! You need to be able to stand your ground firmly and change direction as needed. Paul urges the church to "put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace" (v. 15). Staying balanced, standing your ground and moving forward are good tactics in both spiritual and physical combat!

One of the most basic principles of self-defense is to always travel with a buddy. There is strength in numbers, and criminals are less likely to approach two people than one person alone. In talking about the "shield of faith," Paul describes a similar tactic. Roman shields were best employed in a phalanx of interlocking shields, which provided mutual protection against attack. The shields were often covered with leather, which was soaked in water before battle to extinguish flaming arrows fired by enemy archers.

Keeping the faith involves the cohesion of Christians together in a community of mutual support, instruction, and accountability. That's one of the reasons we gather together as the church. There is strength in numbers as we worship and work together, watch out for one another and protect our friends when they are under attack from the evil one.

Self-defense is really more about having the proper mindset than it is about physical skill. Most martial arts teachers work on mindset even more than kicks, punches and cane thrusts. The "helmet of salvation" protects the mind with the knowledge that we have been saved from sin and death by the death and resurrection of Jesus (v. 17).

But when the time comes and we're under attack, then it's time to use the best offensive weapon we have: "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (v. 17). When Jesus was tempted by Satan in the wilderness, it was clear that he had spent a lifetime leaning on the Scriptures. When Satan tried to use them out of context, Jesus was ready to parry with the gospel truth (Matthew 4:1-11). The more we study the Scriptures, carrying them with us every day, the more we will be ready to parry the devil's lies with the Word of God.

In addition to these everyday carry items, Paul urges us to "pray in the Spirit at all times" and to "keep alert and always persevere in supplication for all the saints" (v. 18). Praying without ceasing keeps our souls always alert to the world around us and its needs, opportunities and dangers.

If Christianity is a crutch or a cane, it's a pretty powerful one for giving the devil a serious dent in the skull. May we learn how to lean on Jesus and, at the same time, be ready to become Cane Fu Christians!

Pastor Keith