

Blood sport: Ultimate Fighting

by [Martin E. Marty](#) in the [November 27, 2007](#) issue

"My allegiance is to 'Jesus Christ, who stood up and died for our sins.'" That was the keynote comment of a victorious Randy Couture, third-time winner of last spring's heavyweight belt in the Ultimate Fighting Championship. In the politically and theologically conservative *World* magazine (September 29), Mark Bergin calls the UFC "the worlds' leading purveyor of mixed martial arts, a bloody and brutal sport." Many teen boys, says Bergin, are so engrossed with the bloody sport that parents are worrying about its ethics and morality. Not to worry, say some, since Couture and others "use their public platform to share Christian testimonies."

The letterhead of one blood sporter sports praise of Jesus: "I can do all things through him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13). Another's text is "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight." That's appropriate, since the gloves in this ultimate blood sport leave the fingers exposed.

Among the UFC's critics is Senator John McCain, who calls this no-holds-barred bloodletting "human cockfighting" and helped force passage of regulations which, in some states at least, rule out "kicks to a downed opponent, eye-gouging . . . strikes to the groin, spine, or back of the head." *World* offers samples of human-cockfighting theological witness (italicized below):

Young people need discipline in their lives, and mixed martial arts gives them exactly that (Jason Barrett, British fighter, Pentecostal preacher).

I am not out there to try to hurt my opponent. I don't go out there angry. I don't try to maim him or something. I just go out there and try to win" (Ron Waterman, fighter and preacher with Team Impact).

I always pray that God's will is done before a fight and, as long as that's done, I'm happy and I'll definitely fight again" (Matt Hughes, nine-time UFC world title holder).

My three young sons and I enjoy watching Ultimate Fighting in conjunction with our Old Testament Bible studies (Mark Driscoll, pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle).

Pastor Driscoll and his three young sons can best learn what “ultimate” is during their Bible studies. For example, there’s that business about the groin. The Bible tells of a Title IX women-included incident with an antifeminist side effect: “If men get into a fight with one another, and the wife of one intervenes to rescue her husband from the grip of his opponents by reaching out and seizing his genitals, you shall cut off her hand; show no pity” (Deut. 25:11-12).

Now that women have been allowed into the ring, or at least into this column, let’s help the Driscoll boys find ultimate fighting in the case of Jael, who seemed peaceful enough when she offered Commander Sisera shelter from Judge Deborah’s and Barak’s search-and-destroy mission (Judg. 4:21). But Ms. Jael then “took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple . . . and he died.” The UFC blood sporters claim to be “ultimate” fighters, and they can’t even gouge eyes? Wishy-washy.

The Driscoll sons and other fans might also read Proverbs 23:14, which advocates discipline: “If you beat them with the rod, you will save their lives from Sheol.” That’s penultimate. One hopes they skip over the parent-child ultimate violence scene in Deuteronomy 21: “If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son, who does not heed [his parents] . . . then all the men of the town shall stone him to death.”

Revenues for Ultimate Fighting last year were \$222,766,000. Against the lure of its blood-letting, what chance will Matthew 5:5 have: “Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.”