

COMMANDING  
>THE HEART<

# VENGEANCE

MATTHEW 5:38-42

19 OCTOBER 2022





# INTRODUCTION





“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

(Matthew 5:38–42)





**PART 1**

**COMMANDING THE HEART:  
VENGEANCE**







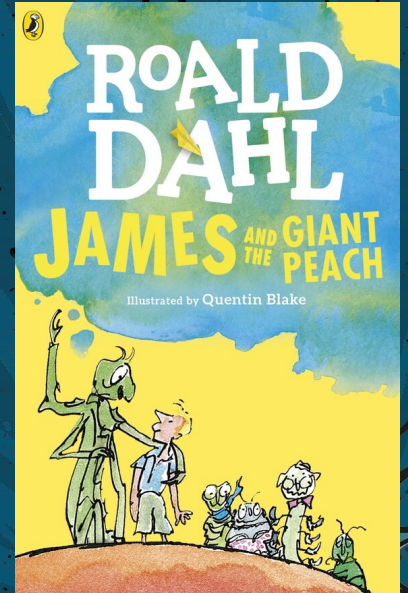
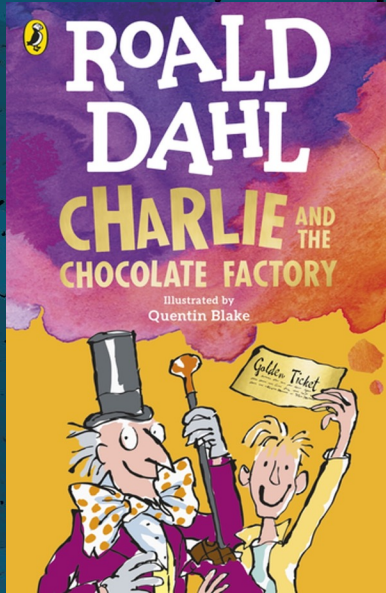


# Introduction: Fantasies of vengeance

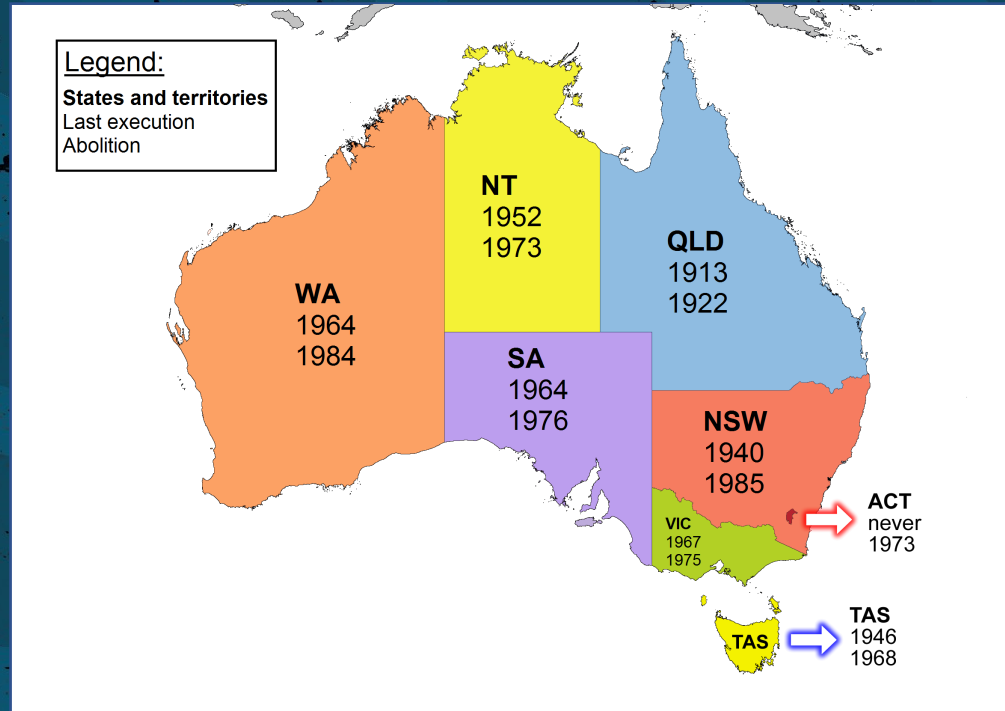




A longing for retribution (justice)?



# An allergy to retributive punishment





# Vengeance and retaliation

An unavoidable  
aspect of  
government

A critical  
personal  
challenge

A central distinctive  
of Christian moral  
teaching





# 1. A distinctive Christian emphasis

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.”

(Matthew 5:38–42)





Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.

(Romans 12:17–19)





My thesis that the practice of nonviolence requires a belief in divine vengeance will be unpopular with many Christians, especially theologians in the West. To the person who is inclined to dismiss it, I suggest imagining that you are delivering a lecture in a war zone (which is where a paper that underlies this chapter was originally delivered). Among your listeners are people whose cities and villages have been first plundered, then burned and leveled to the ground, whose daughters and sisters have been raped, whose fathers and brothers have had their throats slit.





The topic of the lecture: A Christian Attitude Toward Violence.  
The thesis: we should not retaliate since God is perfect non-coercive love ... Soon you would discover that it takes the quiet of a suburban home for the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land, soaked in the blood of the innocent, it will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other pleasant captivities of the liberal mind.

(Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 303-304)

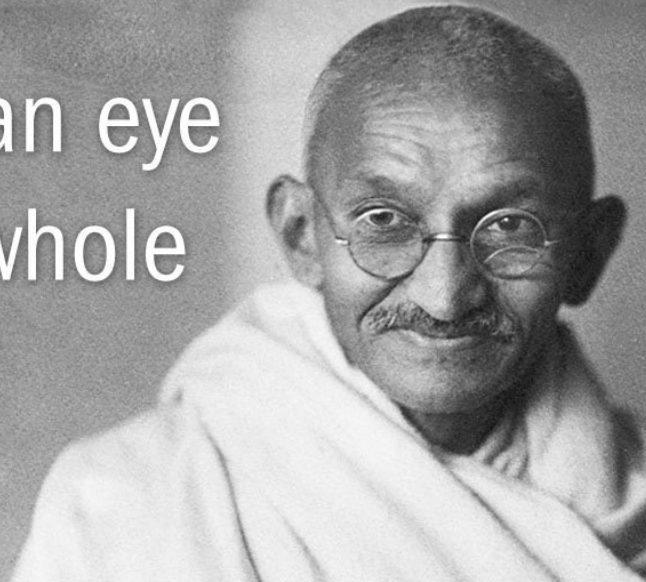




## 2. An eye for an eye: retribution in the Old Testament

“An eye for an eye  
makes the whole  
world blind”

Mahatma Gandhi





## a. Leviticus 24:17-22

“Anyone who takes the life of a human being is to be put to death. <sup>18</sup> Anyone who takes the life of someone’s animal must make restitution—life for life. <sup>19</sup> Anyone who injures their neighbor is to be injured in the same manner: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. The one who has inflicted the injury must suffer the same injury. <sup>21</sup> Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a human being is to be put to death. <sup>22</sup> You are to have the same law for the foreigner and the native-born. I am the Lord your God.”

(Leviticus 24:17–22. See also Exod 19:21; Deut 19:15–21)





## b. Forgiveness?

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbour as yourself. I am the Lord.”

(Leviticus 19:18)





The danger  
of vengeance

An eye for  
an eye

A principle of  
proportion  
and restraint





Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;  
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:  
I have killed a man for wounding me,  
a young man for striking me.  
If Cain is avenged sevenfold,  
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

(Genesis 4:23–24)

Then Peter came to Jesus and  
asked, “Lord, how many times  
shall I forgive my brother or  
sister who sins against me? Up  
to seven times?”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, not  
seven times, but seventy-seven  
times.

(Matthew 18:21–22)





### 3. Understanding New Testament teaching





## a. Jesus' purpose in Matthew 5

- To push back against a misuse of the law
- To hear the law in the light of the kingdom





- Not to reject retribution in judicial punishment
- Romans 12 => Romans 13

For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

(Romans 13:4)





- *Not* to provide specific advice, but to cultivate patterns of action and feeling (virtue)





## 4. Moving towards practicalities

### a. Skepticism about our culture





## b. The complexities of interpersonal forgiveness

- i. What we are *not* called to
- ii. The importance of public judgement
- iii. What we should aspire to





c. Thinking about our moment as a church





## 5. The final word





**PART 2**

# **DISCUSSING PRACTICALITIES**







# 2023 EVENTS:

**Chase Kuhn on love**

15 MARCH

**David VanDrunen on virtue**

7 JUNE

**David Höhne on self-control**

30 AUGUST

**Mark Thompson on perseverance**

18 OCTOBER





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## PART 3

# Q&A

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