



## Safeguarding - A Biblical Mandate

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A quote of disputed origin claims that, “The measure of a civilisation is how it treats its weakest members.” While the source of the reference may be in doubt, the truth of the sentiment resonates the plethora of biblical calls to advocate and act on behalf of the vulnerable. The psalmist urges God’s people to, “Give justice to the weak and the fatherless; maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked” (Psalm 82:3-4 ESV).

For Christians, the moral responsibility that flows from the heart of God to protect both children and adults at risk overarches government’s statutory requirements and guidance. The various safeguarding legislation within the four nations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are secular requirements that in broad terms reflect the biblical principles. Such legislation provides vital frameworks within which we discharge our scriptural mandate. When it comes to safeguarding, our faith must inform our actions.

The need to protect vulnerable groups has been a constant feature of the biblical narrative almost from its inception. The Mosaic law in the Old Testament warns of the severest punishments on those who mistreat the widows, fatherless children and strangers in their midst (Exodus 22:21-22). Jesus does not mince His words when emphasising His feelings towards those who take advantage of innocence. He states, “If anyone causes one of these little ones - those who believe in me - to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” Matthew 18:6 (NIV).

Isaiah upholds compassion toward the needy as a true demonstration of sacrificial love (Isaiah 58). James echoes the prophet by pointing to our attitude toward vulnerable people as the indicator of the authenticity of our faith. He states, “Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27 NKJV). Jesus Himself states that such compassion for the vulnerable is the standard by which He will separate “the sheep and goats” (Matthew 25:31-46). These passages, and many more like them, show that safeguarding is at the very heart of Scripture and should be one of our primary concerns.

Placing the needs and interests of vulnerable people at the heart of our ministry ensures that safeguarding becomes an integral and essential element of living out our gospel calling. The Bible charges every Christian to, “Speak out on behalf of the voiceless, and for the rights of all who are vulnerable” (Proverbs 31:8 CEB).