



The tribe of Issachar understood the times and knew what Israel should do

Issachar Ministries UK seeks to be a people who understand the times, listen to the Lord and know what should be done

## Issachar Comments Papers

Expounding biblical concepts on the world scene today

# THE VALUE OF WHISTLE-BLOWERS

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### Are whistleblowers good for society? Or are they a menace?

Whistleblowers have been much in the news recently and opinion is divided on whether they do a good job or they are bad for society. The conviction of Bradley Manning, the young American soldier sentenced to 35 years in prison for "aiding the enemy" by publishing top-secret American army files divided opinion in America between those who see him as a hero and those who see him as a traitor to his country.

Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, has condemned the trial. But he would, wouldn't he! He said it was a face-saving sham to cover America's embarrassment at the exposure of its corrupt foreign policy. Since the trial it has emerged that Manning is a young man with considerable personal problems and that his indiscriminate publication of secret documents was more of a cry for help than an act of political protest.

But what are the motives of whistleblowers? Are they really concerned for the public good or are they working out some deep personal problem, seeking revenge against others - individuals, or society in general?

### Surveillance

One of the biggest recent acts of whistle-blowing was the leak of a German Government warning in August this year telling its employees not to use Windows 8 which is fitted to all new computers and laptops because it is said to have a "special surveillance chip" aptly named "Trusted Platform Module " (TPM). This allows Microsoft to control all new IBM computers and laptops. The surveillance chip is said to be accessible to the American National Security Agency and no doubt others also.

It seems that nothing is secure in the IT world and we are rapidly entering the surveillance saturated society where we are not only watched by CCTV cameras when we walk in public places but even when we sit with our laptop at home. Are we better off knowing these things, or is this an example of whistle-blowing that we would rather not know?

### To Blow or Not to Blow?

When is it right to be a whistleblower? If you discover things at work, illegal or corrupt practices, should you blow the whistle or keep quiet? Perhaps more importantly if you know a child is being ill treated should you draw the attention of the authorities to this even if it means informing on your neighbours? Do you owe loyalty to family and friends even above the truth? Do you close ranks to maintain the status quo against the whistleblowers?

The problem you face is being sure of your facts. To get it wrong and falsely accuse some innocent person is the kind of nightmare scenario you want to avoid at all costs, so most people keep quiet even when they suspect that something is wrong.

## Moral Dilemma

There is a major moral principle here that all of us have to face at some time in our lives in the family, in our friendships, or in social relationships. The big issue is if you really know something is wrong do you speak out or do nothing about it?

Friends of Aaron Alexis the 34-year-old ex-naval man who shot dead 12 people and injured eight others last month in the Navy Yard in Washington DC were regretting that they had said nothing about their fears that something like this might happen. Alexis was obsessed with violent video games which he played in sessions lasting up to 16 hours at a time. He had a record of violence and his neighbours were afraid of him. When he thought that one neighbour had been 'disrespectful' to him he took out a gun and shot the man's car tyres.

After the mass shooting at the naval base close friends admitted that they knew Alexis was in need of treatment for serious mental illness as he had been 'hearing voices' and they feared the effect of constant exposure to violent videos, but none of them did anything about it. If twelve lives could have been saved and the injuries to eight others prevented, surely one of his friends or somebody in his family should have done something to help this man.

## Personal Responsibility

The Bible has something to say about our responsibilities when we see our friends going wrong. The Prophet Ezekiel reported God saying to him, "*When I say to the wicked, O wicked man, you will surely die, and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood. But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will be saved yourself.*" (33.8)

There are occasions when instead of whistle-blowing something needs to be done quietly and privately, simply telling a friend that he is drinking too much, or he or she is keeping bad company that will lead to trouble. Or there may be other ways of getting help. But there are other things we ought to speak out about publicly when we see things going wrong in the community, or in some organisation where we are a member, or in the life of the nation.

## Prophetic Action

The great prophets in the Bible were genuine patriots - they loved their country - and they were not afraid to speak out even if it got them into trouble. Jeremiah was put in the stocks and the public pelted him for saying that the nation was heading for disaster; but he was proved right. Amos saw traders in the market cheating housewives and he saw the way the powerful treated the powerless, and he spoke out, "*They trample on the heads of the poor,*" he said "*and deny justice to the oppressed*". (1.7)

The prophets had a great influence in the life of the nation as they fearlessly stood against injustice and corruption and the oppression of the powerless. It is this kind of prophetic whistle-blowing that we need today where each of us is prepared to take a stand for righteousness on major issues in our local community and in the nation. But alongside this we should each be caring for our neighbours and watching out for the welfare of our friends by being prepared to say personally to them the right word at the right time and in the right way.

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