

An old man and his teenage son were riding a train. A middle-aged couple sat across from them. His son, looking out the window, exclaimed, "Daddy look, the trees are running behind us." The couple, somewhat amused, just nodded at the old man. His son then said, "Daddy, look at the clouds. They are running with us." The couple, still smiling, squirmed in their seats. Then, the young man said, "Daddy, look at the cows. They are running away from us." Unable to resist any longer, the lady leaned forward and asked the old man, "Why don't you take your son to see a good doctor?" The old man just smiled, then replied "We have just returned from the doctor, an eye surgeon, and my son can now see for the first time in his life."

The famous radio commentator Paul Harvey, following a commercial break, would start the second part of his broadcast with the statement, "And now, for the rest of the story." In the illustration above, the "rest of the story" proved to be quite an embarrassment for the middle-aged couple. You see, they made two unfounded judgments about the old man and his son: that something was wrong with his son, and that he had failed as a parent to obtain medical help. Those assumptions were based on a combination of ignorance, arrogance, and an unwillingness to seek understanding.

We live in exceptionally tumultuous times. Protests – both peaceful and violent – abound over incidents of brutality and death, spawned in some instances by systemic racism. Our society has become increasingly polarized politically, socially, economically and religiously. We live in a tribal culture, and anything said or done by a member of another tribe is automatically wrong. No questions asked. Contrary to James 1:19, we have abandoned listening, and are exceptionally quick to speak, quick to anger, and quick to judge. Unfortunately, there are those in the evangelical Christian movement who have adopted these methods rather than pursue true Biblical justice.

Jesus knew we would have difficulty with judging and He gave us a stern warning in Matthew 7:1-2, when He said "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you." This does not mean we should never judge. We make judgments all the time – between right and wrong, between dangerous choices and safe choices. It does mean, though, that if we judge others hypocritically and un-biblically, we risk paying an enormous price ourselves. It will rob us of our hope and joy (Romans 13:15), pollute our hearts (Mark 7:20-23), and make us vulnerable to hatred (Proverbs 6:16-19).

So, the next time you are tempted to judge someone's words or actions, make sure you know the whole story. Listen carefully and thoughtfully. Resist the urge to make hasty judgments. Ask questions designed to clarify anything that is unclear. Once you understand, then offer your observations in Christian love and with a humble heart (Matthew 18:15-17). Where the facts show an injustice that should be righted, take action that shows a genuine love for your neighbor and a desire, as one created in God's image, to demonstrate His righteousness towards His entire creation.