

## ***KNOWN BY THEIR FRUITS***

We leave final judgment up to God, as God alone is the final JUDGE. But we are to be “fruit-inspectors”.

### **Matthew 7:16 (NKJV)**

**16 You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?**

Christ said we will know “false prophets” by their fruits! This is how we know them. Fruits are not merely what one says or what one does in isolation, but rather the whole BIG picture of what one says and does as an ongoing lifestyle pattern.

Those who are good players can play the game really well for a time. Recall the “player” called Judas. False prophets might fool most people for a time, but true character does come out in the crucible of life over time. This is what Jesus is saying, “Watch their lifestyle over time.” What they are really about will come out.

This is one reason the Church is not to put a man into the position of elder if he is a novice. He is to be proven over time. It is for this reason Paul exhorts not to “lay hands on anyone hastily” (1 Tim. 5:22). Deacons, before they are appointed to serve in this office, are first to be “tested” (1 Tim. 3:10). People are known by the fruits of their life, whether it be good or bad.

Fruit is what a tree produces. Metaphorically, it represents what comes out in the life. Does the life bring forth Christ-centered fruit or does it reveal self-centered fruit? Who or what is the person living for?

The thing about fruit is that you can’t tell overnight what kind of fruit is going to be brought forth. It takes time for a tree to produce fruit. This is known clearly over time. When someone wants to be a teacher, give it some time. Go slow. Watch for what kind of fruit is brought forth.

“Living according to kingdom norms can be feigned for a time, but what one is will eventually reveal itself in what one does.” – ***D.A. Carson***

As you study the N.T., there are really three areas of “fruit-inspection” that are to be applied. We are concerned with a person’s character, their creed, and their conduct. These three should align with kingdom values in a consistent manner – not perfectly, but consistently.

## **A. Character (Self-Oriented – Problem with Authority)**

### **1 Timothy 6:3–5 (NKJV)**

**3** If anyone teaches otherwise and does **not consent to wholesome words**, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which **accords with godliness**,

**4** he is **proud**, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with **disputes and arguments** over words, from which come **envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions**,

**5** useless **wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth**, who **suppose that godliness is a means of gain**. From such withdraw yourself.

Paul in 1 Timothy 3:2-7 gives 15 specific qualifications that are necessary for one to serve as an elder/overseer. Most of them are essentially matters of character. What is their character like when no one is watching?

## **B. Creed**

### **Romans 16:17–18 (NKJV)**

**17** Now I urge you, brethren, note those who **cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine** which you learned, and avoid them.

**18** For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.

## **C. Conduct**

### **2 Peter 2:12–14 (NKJV)**

**12** But these, like natural brute beasts made to be caught and destroyed, speak evil of the things they do not understand, and will utterly perish in their own corruption,

**13** and will receive the wages of unrighteousness, as those who count it **pleasure to carouse** in the daytime. They are spots and blemishes, **carousing** in their own deceptions while they feast with you,

**14** having **eyes full of adultery** and that **cannot cease from sin, enticing unstable souls**. They have a **heart trained in covetous practices**, and are accursed children.

Of course, there is overlap here between character, creed, and conduct. They go together. But Christ's point is that what one really is by NATURE will come out. It will show in the fruits of their life, be it in character, creed, or conduct, or some combination of the three.

Christ asks the rhetorical question: ***“Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles?”*** The answer is, “Of course not!”

If you plant grapes, thorns, figs, or thistles, the reality of their nature will be seen in the fruit. And so it is in the life as well. Our real nature is seen in the fruit borne in the life. Fruit doesn't lie!

## **2 Peter 2:20–22 (NKJV)**

**20** For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the **knowledge** of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning.

**21** For it would have been **better for them not to have known** the way of righteousness, than having known it, **to turn** from the holy commandment delivered to them.

**22** But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: **“A dog** returns to his own vomit,” and, **“a sow,** having washed, to her wallowing in the mire.”

These people have known the truth. They have the knowledge of Christ as Lord and Savior, and yet in the end, they turn from the truth. They may have even made a profession, but it wasn't real, and their real nature comes out as they go along. Domesticate your dog all you want, it still remains a dog. Wash the sow and clean her up real good for the fair, but the pig still retains the nature of a pig.

And this is Christ's point! The nature of a person will reveal itself in the life. People are thus known by their fruits.