

Project Runway

Designer Clothes For Disciples

Rehoboam: Part 7

Written By

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Walking down *The Streets of America* in Disney world, it looks as if all of the buildings are real and quite functional. Here's a picture I took in September of 2007 when Liz and I were on vacation. See what I mean? Appears to be an ordinary street from any old American city, doesn't it?

Keep walking, however, and you'll eventually discover that appearances can be deceiving. Take a look at another picture I took at the end of the street.

Shocking, isn't it? From one angle everything looks quite normal and authentic. From another angle, however, you realize most of the store fronts are just flimsy, fake, cheap facades, which are propped by steel frames.





It's simply amazing the detail Disney put into engineering and designing these beautiful turn of the century buildings. Business names adorn the quaint stores, fire escapes look like the real thing, and the curtains in the upper story windows give it a realistic touch. Yet it is, for the most part, nothing more than a studio set, not a real town.

As I turned the final corner and caught my first glimpse of the steel skeletal structures holding up most of the buildings, I couldn't help but think to myself: *This reminds me of some people*

I've met in my life. Outwardly, they look one way, but inwardly ... behind the carefully constructed facade ... is another person altogether, a fake, a phony. Maybe you've met them, too. Maybe you know them right now but haven't yet figured out their life is a flimsy façade. Well, just keep walking, give it some time, and eventually you'll come to the end of the street. At that point, you'll see what God sees.

Rehoboam, the son of King Solomon took the throne of Israel upon the death of his father. To read over the synopsis of his reign in 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles is to come face to face with a man who was nothing more than cheap imitation of the real thing, a person who wanted to appear holy, wise, and godly, but whose life choices, decisions, and actions proved he was just carefully constructed outer, fake shell of integrity and holiness.

He may, or may not have realized the sham of his life. Sometimes folks like this have lived this way so long they can't see who they really are and how they behave. But regardless we'd be safe to say that God never wants His people to wear what I'd call *The Phony Suit*. What does He desire? Several biblical texts give us some timely insight:

- The Lord Jesus wants us to be open, honest, transparent, and authentic. Paul's pastoral words to the Corinthian church which caused him so much personal pain illustrate the reality of this point. Writing to them about his true motives in writing them a corrective letter, which is now lost but would have been Third Corinthians, we can't help but see a true saint in action:

¹ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. ² Make room for us *in your hearts*; we wronged no one, we corrupted no one, we took advantage of no one. ³ I do not speak to condemn you, for I have said before that you are in our hearts to die together and to live together. ⁴ Great is my confidence in you; great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort; I am overflowing with joy in all our affliction. ⁵ For even when we came into Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were afflicted on every side: conflicts without, fears within. ⁶ But God, who comforts the depressed, comforted us by the coming of Titus; ⁷ and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me; so that I rejoiced even more. ⁸ For though I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it; though I did regret it—for I see that that letter caused you sorrow, though only for a while— ⁹ I

now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to *the point of* repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to *the will of* God, so that you might not suffer loss in anything through us (1 Corinthians 7).

See Paul's vulnerability? See how cleared up his true motivations in offering corrective words regarding a sin in their church? See how he circled back around and shared how their repentance caused him great joy? What a saint. No wonder we're still talking about him 2,000 years later.

- The Lord Jesus wants depth of character. He's looking for people with real, bonafied, I-can't-be-bought-off integrity, whether they are leaders or followers.
- The Lord Jesus longs for our words in public to be backed up by our words to others in private. Are your words consistent?
- The Lord Jesus desires for our talk to be backed up with our walks. He expects our theology to actually change and transform our lives, instead of being something we just know in our minds so we can feel spiritual. Is the Word of God truly having a positive impact on your character?

We usually know what God desires from our character; however, we don't always choose to wear those garments. No, sometimes we, like King Rehoboam, willfully choose to create a façade of spirituality in order to keep the sin(s) we've grown accustomed to. If this is a snapshot of your life, I trust God will use this brief biographical sketch to help you to move onto real, measurable, life-changing maturity. To head in this directions we'll begin in our customary fashion by posing a penetrating question:

How To You Know If You're Wearing A Phony Suit? (1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles)

The divinely inspired historical narrative from King Rehoboam's life helps us to see the basic tell-tale signs of a cheap, fake suit.

You Only Appear To Care

Naval officers are known to speak of the "integrity of the hull." What they are speaking about is what happens to a submarine when it comes out of dry dock and goes out for its first sea trial. The Captain will take the vessel to extreme depths to test the hull's integrity. If there are any weld issues during this shakedown cruise, the dive will inevitably bring them to light so they can be addressed later.

In many respects, God sovereignly took Rehoboam, the new king on a shakedown cruise when he first became the king to see if his hull had any issues. He'll do the same in your life, too. He'll permit things to occur, sometimes with problematic people, to see how your spiritual character will fare. Note well how God set up this cruise in Rehoboam's life:

¹ Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. ² Now when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it, he was living in Egypt (for he was yet in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of King Solomon). ³ Then they sent and called him, and Jeroboam and all the assembly of Israel came and spoke to Rehoboam, saying, ⁴ 'Your father made our yoke hard; now therefore lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.' ⁵ Then he said to them, 'Depart for three days, then return to me.' So the people departed. ⁶ King Rehoboam consulted with the elders who had served his father Solomon while he was still alive, saying, 'How do you counsel me to answer this people?' ⁷ Then they spoke to him, saying, 'If you will be a servant to this people today, and will serve them and grant them their petition, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever.' ⁸ But he forsook the counsel of the elders which they had given him, and consulted with the young men who grew up with him and served him (1 Kings 12).

Hold it right there. Let's get a brief handle on this historical context of this political problem.

Israel was composed of twelve tribes, with Judah, the largest tribe, and Ephraim being the two most powerful tribes. From time immemorial they didn't get along with each other. God chose Judah for the kingly/messianic line, and this never sat well with jealous ol' Ephraim. They wanted the power and the glory, and on two occasions, one during the military leadership of Gideon (Judges 8:1-3), and another under the skilled leadership of Jephthah (Judges 12:1-6), they complained their hard work and efforts weren't recognized enough. You know, they didn't get enough pats on the back for their sacrifice, so they despised Judah. In fact, their hatred toward their brother was so great at times it spilled over into open hostilities (Judges 8:1ff; 2 Samuel 2:9; 19:42).

King Solomon's death gave Ephraim, and the other nine northern tribes, the opportunity they were looking for to get Judah to at least back off a little and give them some breathing room. Under Solomon's reign, the kingdom reached its zenith politically, geographically, economically, and militarily. All of this growth, however, came with a heavy price tag called taxation and forced labor (1 Kings 4:7-28; 1 Kings 5:13). Now with the Ephraimite, Jeroboam, back on the scene, they had a leader who could effectively present their case to the new ruler.

Knowing the volatile nature between the Southern and Northern tribes, King Rehoboam, therefore, traveled north to Shechem to be crowned king, instead of having this occur in Jerusalem. His actions were politically motivated, seeking to smooth things over with his agitated tribal siblings. General Joshua gave his "Who will serve the Lord" speech at Shechem once they secured the Promised Land from the wicked inhabitants, thus it had an historical and a political value (Joshua 24). Abimelech, the son of Gideon, also offered himself as king here during the period of the Judges (Judges 9:1ff). Being crowned, therefore, on their soil, in their key city would only stand to improve his weak, tenuous position.

For all intents and purposes Rehoboam's actions look authentic, genuine, and real. How nice of him to travel to their city with his entourage. He really put himself out to go to them instead of them coming to him. Yet, from what we read in the entire account, he really had no intention of working with them to solve the problem they presented. They merely wanted the

taxes and mandatory work conscriptions eased ... not removed. If the new king would do that, then they'd be his loyal, devoted subjects.

Wanting to appear wise and thoughtful, Rehoboam told them he'd need three days to talk it over with his key advisors. First, he spoke with the wise men who had given his father sagacious advice. Then, he spoke with the young bucks he had grown up with. Their counsel regarding how to answer the ten tribes couldn't have been more different. One was for mercy, the other for meanness. You'll note, no argument, either way, was given by Rehoboam to either group. Why? He knew coming in to the discussion what he was going to do anyway. Listening to the older elders was just a formality to make him look good before he lowered the boom. He didn't really care about their legitimate concern. No, he only cared about what he wanted. His agenda was the agenda, no matter what the people said or what wise counselors articulated.

And so it is with those who are phony. They say all the right spiritual things, but their actions betray their true motive and show the steel façade behind the well-crafted building. Let me illustrate how they operate.

Years ago at another church one person wronged another person. The victim eventually confronted the victimizer in a biblical and loving fashion. The victimizer responded, "Oh, we need to address that. I am so sorry. It was not my intention to do that to you." Days passed and no meeting occurred to work through the issue. Months passed. Still nothing. To my knowledge, the victimizer never met with the person in question because they had no intention on meeting. Can you say "spiritual façade?"

Sad, isn't it?

Let me ask you a deeply personal question, and, please, don't get defensive:

- Is there any phoniness in your life? I mean are you skilled at saying all the right things to appear spiritual, while you have absolutely no intention of following through on what you know?
- Do you say you care about others, and then quickly talk them down behind their backs?
- Do you say you forgive and forget, and then quietly move to nurse your grudge?
- Do you say you'll pray for someone, and then never utter their name before God's throne?
- Do you promise to get together with hurting, needy people, and then never pick up the cell phone?
- Do you say you'll get together with someone you have complex relationship with for the purpose of fixing things; however, you continually devise reasons why you just can't fit into your busy schedule?

Take note right now. God lovingly longs for you to drop the façade and start building a structure known for true care and compassion. He wants your words to your tribal brothers and sisters in Christ, and those with the non-Christian world at large, to match how He has told us all to live:

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you" (Ephesians 4:32).

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“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

“Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble” (1 Peter 3:8).

Paul, Jesus, and Peter knew what they were talking about because they were anything but phony. They showed, on a daily basis, it is possible to live an authentic, transparent life. Will you join them by taking the phony suit and laying it down right now once and for all? Will you be a saint who really cares for others?

What does a caring person look like?

- They remember your issue and follow up with you.
- They do sacrificial things to meet your need.
- They drop by unannounced to see how you are doing.
- They stop the busyness of their day to give you a call to check in and up on you.
- They don't run from you when they see sinful leakage in your life.
- They let you know they are praying for you and they remember what they are praying about with specificity.

Rehoboam never got this memo. I hope you do for if our world needs anything it is leaders and ordinary people who back up saying they love God and others and who actually show it.

A second earmark of a person playing spiritual games is showcased in the next principle which naturally arises from the verses we just read and the ones which follow:

You Listen To The Wrong People

Go back to Rehoboam's counseling session, and listen and learn:

“⁹ So he said to them, ‘What counsel do you give that we may answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, ‘Lighten the yoke which your father put on us?’ ¹⁰ The young men who grew up with him spoke to him, saying, ‘Thus you shall say to this people who spoke to you, saying, ‘Your father made our yoke heavy, now you make it lighter for us!’ But you shall speak to them, ‘My little finger is thicker than my father's loins! ¹¹ ‘Whereas my father loaded you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions’” (1 Kings 12).

Someone once wisely concluded: “The trouble with good advice is that it usually interferes with your plans” (*Leadership*, Vol. X, #3, Summer 1989:76). They must have had Rehoboam in mind when they wrote this tasty morsel of wisdom. Actually, Rehoboam could have benefitted from the writings of his sagacious father in the book of Proverbs:

A wise man by hearing them will advance in learning, an intelligent man will gain sound guidance ... (Proverbs 1:5).

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The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel (Proverbs 12:15).

Listen to counsel and accept discipline, that you may be wise the rest of your days (Proverbs 19:20).

Wise leaders and wise people don't come into every situation as if they have the corner on how things should happen, nor do they enter complex life situations with an unbending, I'm-smarter-than-you agenda. On the contrary, they are humble enough to know they aren't necessarily the smartest person in the room. They are humble enough to know there is, in fact, wisdom in the counsel of many wise counselors. They are humble enough to look at the facts, not ideology, in any given situation and make course corrections for the betterment of others. Does any of this describe your life? If so, then you are wearing the kind of spiritual garments with make Christ proud of your progress. Rehoboam, on the other hand, never thought of the value of being a truly wise man. He was more interested in being a wise guy, a man arrogantly wrapped up in himself.

Why did Rehoboam side with his buddies and cast off the unwanted advice of the older, wiser political advisors. I think there are three answers.

One, he wanted to continue his lavish, powerful lifestyle. "Cut taxes? Are you kidding? That will cut into my nightlife." Such is the life of a spiritual phony. He will do anything to keep power pegged to the limit even at the expense of the viability of the country.

Two, he gave into peer pressure. The old sages would soon be dead and gone. What mattered, then, was what the up and coming political advisors thought. Here was a great opportunity to see them in action, and to give them some raw power to establish their new positions. To withhold this opportunity from them would be court exclusion and ostracization. Better to let them have their way so they'd feel important. Such is the life of a spiritual phony. They don't think for themselves all the time. No, they are prone to being pushed around by all the wrong people because they ultimately don't really stand for anything, or they stand for godless principles and will only listen to those who will support their godless desires. Such a person is a fool in the biblical sense. Makes you ask yourself, "Do I permit people who don't walk with God to sway the way I think? Do I quickly and easily go with the cultural flow on any given cultural issue? How about going with the biblical flow for a change? Here's another timely question: Who is speaking into your life? Who's giving you advice? Do they fear God? Do they know the Word of God? Have they lived a wise life by making good choices or by learning from bad choices? Who are your counselors? As Solomon warns in the first chapter of Proverbs, picking the wrong group of friends can, and will, bring pressures to go off the proverbial cliff with them.

Three, he was a pessimist, a man who saw the glass as half empty. Think of it. Rehoboam inherited a powerful and wealthy empire. Sure it had its political, social, and spiritual issues, but they were not the norm. His own distorted view of leadership, one bathed in meanness, motivated him to up the ante so he could expand his power over his subjects. Note how he didn't say one positive thing about his father's leadership, nor did he utter one word about all the positive accomplishments his father's reign brought to people's lives. On the contrary, he thought leadership consisted of crushing and whipping the people with added hardship and turmoil. Isn't it amazing how all the accomplishments of a great country can be quickly unraveled by the unwise actions of one politician in a key position?

He didn't get the result he wanted:

“¹⁶When all Israel saw that the king did not listen to them, the people answered the king, saying, ‘What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; To your tents, O Israel! Now look after your own house, David!’ So Israel departed to their tents” (1 Kings 12).

Within short order Jeroboam became the new king over the new ten tribal kingdom, forever splitting the once great empire of David and Solomon.

Rehoboam should have listened to the old sages. But he didn’t because he didn’t like what they had to say. How often does this happen? Too often. A young lady some twenty-five years ago asked me if she should marry a man we both knew well. She had never been married and he was divorced with two teenage, out of control boys. She was a believer, he was an unbeliever. She was sweet, kind, and compassionate. He had an anger problem, and his physical size kept most from talking to him about it. His boys mocked and made fun of her constantly.

After I laid out all these stats, I told her, “I think you should start dating someone else. He is clearly not God’s man for you. Better to wait for the man who fits the description of a godly husband than to marry someone who is the opposite of that model.”

She cried, I handed her Kleenex after Kleenex, and with a shaky voice she remarked, “Pastor, you told me exactly what I needed to hear. Thank you.”

She left my office and not long thereafter she married the man in question. Unfortunately, it didn’t take long for that marriage to head south.

People who are playing games with God typically act in this fashion. They’ll say they want to hear what good, godly counselors say, but they have no intention of following the sound advice. Sad, but true.

Additionally, people like this will place around them folks who will support and rubberstamp their twisted positions, and who will not hold their lifestyle accountable. They’ll start listening to carnal Christians or non-Christian friends who will tell them what they want to hear: “If you really love that guy, then go ahead and follow your heart and marry him.” “If you are not happy, then just divorce your mate. Your happiness is what matters most.” Is that you? Do you tend to act this way? Do you just listen to your own little group of “wise men,” because you don’t like what other real wise men have to say? A true wise man listens to all, and then talks to God. This was something Rehoboam failed miserably at. Not once did he consult the Lord. I guess he didn’t like what God thought either.

Here’s another question I have to ask: Are you disgruntled in your life? Are you the perpetual pessimist? Do you typically talk to people who will support, and maybe even help enhance your unsettled nature? I’m sure you seen it beyond the church, haven’t you? Such is the activity in far too many homes and offices? Again, this is how people who are playing games with God act. I think it’s time to come clean. I think it’s time to start listening to godly people, to folks who aren’t negative, but positive, to folks who won’t always side with you, but will openly and honestly tell you ... out of love ... what you desperately need to hear.

Another trait of a phony is this ...

You Project Peace But Prepare For War

Be honest. Sometimes you have intense quarrels and heated disagreements with the people closest to you, and sometimes your response to the situation isn’t the best either. Take, for instance, a married couple who couldn’t work through their issue, so they just decided to give

each other the ol' cold shoulder. The Preachingtoday.com website continues with the instructive story:

A week into their mute argument, the man realized he needed his wife's help. In order to catch a flight to Chicago for a business meeting, he had to get up at 5 a.m. Not wanting to be the first to break the silence, he wrote on a piece of paper, "Please wake me at 5 a.m." The next morning the man woke up only to discover his wife was already out of bed, it was 9 a.m., and his flight had long since departed. He was about to find his wife and demand an answer for her failings when he noticed a piece of paper by the bed. He read, "It's 5 a.m. Wake up"¹

We laugh, but it is so true. At times we'll get in a complex situation with someone close to us and how we respond isn't in the best fashion. Rehoboam wrote the chapter in this book.

Rehoboam attempted to launch a military strike against the ten tribes in order to bring them under his control. When God told him to cease and desist through the prophet Shemaiah, he did; however, pay close attention to what he did next according to the Chronicler:

"Now when Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, 180,000 chosen men who were warriors, to fight against Israel to restore the kingdom to Rehoboam. ²But the word of the LORD came to Shemaiah the man of God, saying, ³Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin, saying, ⁴'Thus says the LORD, You shall not go up or fight against your relatives; return every man to his house, for this thing is from Me.' So they listened to the words of the LORD and returned from going against Jeroboam. ⁵Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem and built cities for defense in Judah. ⁶ Thus he built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa, ⁷ Beth-zur, Soco, Adullam, ⁸ Gath, Mareshah, Ziph, ⁹ Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah, ¹⁰ Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron, which are fortified cities in Judah and in Benjamin. ¹¹He also strengthened the fortresses and put officers in them and stores of food, oil and wine. ¹²He put shields and spears in every city and strengthened them greatly. So he held Judah and Benjamin" (2 Chronicles 11).

On the one hand, Rehoboam obeyed God. On the other, he fortified his defenses. For what? War. He was not interested in getting along with his tribal brothers, and he sensed a fight brewing down the road. So what did he do? He fortified his forts throughout the land for the time in the future when he and the tribes would go head to head.

Phonies typically act this way. To your face everything is fine. Behind your back everything is on fire. To your face, they apologize. Behind your back they organize. I've seen it. I'm sure you've seen it too. They surround themselves with people who will listen to them. Then they start building them up with ammo, which usually consists of shells titled misinformation, distortion, and half-truths. This way when the war occurs, they've already got a bunch of people ready to fight on their side to defend the "country," be what it may.

¹ Van Morris, "Husband Pays For Silent Treatment," *Preachingtoday.com* accessed July 8, 2015, <http://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2004/november/15628.html>

God never wants us to live like this. He wants us, when we receive a clear, convicting word from Him, to publically and privately live in light of that word. Rehoboam failed to do this. I trust you won't follow in his footsteps. Look at it from this perspective. If God tells you to restore a relationship, then forgive and forget; don't say you forgive and then start looking for how you can start fortifying your position. Put the bullets down. Drop the arrows. Pick up the tools of mercy and grace and move on to a whole new level in your walk with God.

A final earmark of a phony person is about as noticeable as the first three:

You Work On Image, Not Substance

During Rehoboam's wicked reign, Shishank, king of Egypt, invaded Israel and successfully stripped the magnificent Holy Temple of key artifacts, like the 500 golden shields Solomon had manufactured through his gifted craftsmen (1 Kings 10:16-17). Pastor and writer, Charles Swindoll, estimates the cost of these shields by today's rates at \$176,000,000 (*Fascinating Stories Of Forgotten Lives*: 183). This was some loss. How would the phony King Rehoboam respond? In classic fashion. Read on and you'll see what I mean:

“²⁷ So King Rehoboam made shields of bronze in their place, and committed them to the care of the commanders of the guard who guarded the doorway of the king's house. ²⁸ Then it happened as often as the king entered the house of the LORD, that the guards would carry them and would bring them back into the guards' room” (1 Kings 14).

What a sham! What a facade! He didn't dare leave these shields out in the open for people to see daily. They'd be sure to see the difference between bronze and gold, and at that point his steel skeletal structure propping up his facade of a life would be known to all. The gig would be up. So, he only had his key soldiers bring the shiny shields out on special occasions. See how hard he worked to keep up his holy image?

One day while a man walked through an old overgrown citrus grove, he happened upon a lemon tree. It had large beautiful ripe lemons just right for pie. He picked the best the tree had to offer and was eager to get home but before he left he decided to cut one open for a taste. He opened his knife and split one in half only to find that there was no meat only rind to the core.

Yeah, I think this describes Rehoboam well: All rind, no meat. So it is with spiritual phony, shallow types. They work overtime at getting you to think they are spiritual, that they, of all people, possess spiritual meat. They usually know all the Christian jargon. They might know their Bible real well. But just because they've been in the Bible doesn't mean the Bible has been through them. That's another matter altogether. They might attend many Christian functions. And if they are older, they may have bought into the mis-guided notion that just because they are old they are wise. H. L. Mencken, the American journalist, satirist, and cultural critic from the first half of the twentieth century, didn't get everything right in his writings, but his quote about age and wisdom is spot on: “*The older I grow, the more I distrust the familiar doctrine that age brings wisdom.*”² Wisdom doesn't naturally come with age. Wisdom comes at any age from one who models their life after the Word of God and who isn't afraid to seek and apply wisdom from truly godly, Christ-honoring people.

² Howard Hendricks and Bob Phillips, *Values & Virtues* (Sisters, Oregon: Mulnomah Books, 1997): 210.

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Do you have a façade of faith? Does this unsettling statement describe you? If it does, I think the Lord is ready right now to do a little demolition on your street. When He's finished building a real building out of your life, I think, no, I know, you will be amazed as the wonderful results.