



## [Ecclesiastes 8:4-9](#)

(4) Where the word of a king *is*, *there is* power;  
And who may say to him, "What are you doing?"  
(5) He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful;  
And a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment,  
(6) Because for every matter there is a time and judgment,  
Though the misery of man increases greatly.  
(7) For he does not know what will happen;  
So who can tell him when it will occur?  
(8) No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit,  
And no one has power in the day of death.  
*There is* no release from that war,  
And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it. (9) All this I have seen,  
and applied my heart to every work that is done under the sun: *There is* a time in  
which one man rules over another to his own hurt.

## [Ecclesiastes 8:17](#)

(17) then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover *it*, yet he will not find *it*; moreover, though a wise *man* attempts to know *it*, he will not be able to find *it*.

*New King James Version*

The term "king" used in this context makes some avoid or completely overlook the broader issue involved in the subject of deference. Hardly any of us will ever directly be confronted by a literal king. However, all of us are under the authority of leadership where we are employed, in the home, at school, or for that matter, even as we are driving to do our shopping. The principles of wisdom given in terms of a king, then, may apply to situations in our lower-level social status. To understand the counsel better, we can substitute the term "leader," which is better suited to our lives.

Verse 4 begins an intriguing paragraph, as Solomon gives overall reasons why deferential respect is good counsel. It adds a note of sternness to Paul's words in Romans 13, making Solomon's counsel good and useful information for us. We might call it a series of common-sense reasons to prepare us for his conclusion in verse 17, rather than strictly spiritual reasons why being thoughtfully careful before a ruler, especially a stern one, is wise on its surface.

The first reason is the most directly spiritual, one we must consider highly important. People in positions of authority in society stand to us in the place of [God](#) because His Word clearly declares that they are ordained of God. Because God is involved, it should immediately suggest to us the reality of a greater purpose and power, and we should treat such authority figures with care. Therefore, with this advance warning, should we ever be put in this position, we must be respectful and on our toes.

A second general thought is suggested in verses 6-9. The idea is that we do not know the future, and we are virtually powerless even in controlling the present. Solomon wants us to take our limitations into serious consideration. [1 Peter 5:6-7](#) provides this similar sound advice: "Be clothed with humility, for God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourself under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time."

A third thought is covered more thoroughly in verses 10-15. We are aware of grave injustices in [this world](#), yet we can still enjoy the life God gives. We have to recognize that even if he grants our desire—for which we might have come before the leader—though it may be important to us, will not change anything in society. This is a reality. What we desire is not the solution to all of mankind's problems. Even if our desire is effective, it will change things only temporarily. He is not counseling us to abandon hope but to be willing to recognize the realities of life.

The fourth puts a cap on the entire circumstance: Since God is indeed involved, even the wisest person cannot find out all of His work. We must hold our expectations of accomplishment somewhat in check. In other words, be moderate in our expectations because we do not "see" things as God does. Compared to Him, we have severe limitations, and thus wisdom, even though using it is always good, may seem to have limitations.

It is also helpful to understand that Solomon's common-sense reasons are better understood within the historical times and circumstances in which they were given. If we apply their spirit to our time, we will find they are practical and workable regardless of the era we may live in.

The Berean: Daily Verse and Commentary for Ecclesiastes 8:4-9 (<http://www.theberean.org>)

— John W. Ritenbaugh

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