



[Ecclesiastes 8:5-8](#)

(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.

New King James Version

In these verses about dealing with those in authority over us, the focus of deference appears to shift to facing a leader with a reputation for unusual discernment and perhaps stern, unbending judgment. Is the king here the Creator [God](#) or an earthly king? Even though Solomon is, in an overall sense, providing us wisdom about how we should approach an earthly king, he never completely loses sight of God, who stands unseen behind the earthly king's power. He seems to be giving the earthly king here a great deal more than the usual level of respect.

If it is God that he writes of, then it appears to make more sense because we can learn of the real power behind the throne. We can learn to fear God more deeply and readily by observing nature and applying to our lives what we discern there of His character. If we do this, we will see some of His attributes and come to respect them more deeply.

Does not God say that He upholds all things by the word of His power ([Hebrews 1:3](#))? Careful and thoughtful observation of the natural world reveals the compelling, harmonious, and sometimes breathtaking beauty of the mind of our great Creator. It also at times displays His awesome and mysterious power that, almost like a machine, seemingly appears to move on inflexibly, not knowing or caring what it inflicts. Who can

stop the weather from happening?

Everybody and everything gets caught up in God's movements. A blizzard, tornado, earthquake, flood, or drought seems unsympathetic about what or who is caught in its devastation. It is as if, once God's purpose is formed, nothing can turn it aside, despite human woes. These are displays of power that everyone should rightfully fear. Yet, the wise person will discern that God's purposes come to fruition slowly, so he patiently waits, having perceived that, behind all the outward appearances of harshness, there is good within it. Such a wise use of power can influence a human king.

Verse 7 appears to say that God, the great and awesome King, operates without regard for man's desire to know the future. Why is this good? Because not knowing the future with any certainty tends to keep man dependent on God. It makes [faith](#) in His love a necessity for his spiritual survival. When a person stands before a human ruler, he should keep his utter dependence on God in mind.

In verse 8, Solomon touches on death as perhaps God's ultimate power over man. When a man's time arrives, only God has the power to give him continued existence. The breath of life is in the hand of God, and if He allows this last enemy to grasp us, there is no escape. Solomon is reminding us that God's rule of His creation is not helter-skelter but operated with order and specific, individual attention to detail. No man has power to retain life beyond his appointed time. There are no grounds on which a person can procure exemption. Rebellious opposition to God will not avail us. Deference is clearly the order of the day to the Christian.

The overall point of Solomon's sobering exposition is that the Creator God must absolutely be treated with the greatest of respect and reverence. The human king, who stands in God's place before us as His agent, should also be treated with a measure of the same respect. In his office, he shares in some aspects of the Creator God's governing power. We must learn that the human ruler does not have to consult us, his subordinate, for permission to carry out whatever judgment he makes in regard to us.

— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[**Ecclesiastes and Christian Living \(Part Fifteen\): Deference**](#)

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