

Psalm 141 - A Prayer for No Compromise on Sin

Introduction

I heard of a news a few years ago that a 30-year-old woman was shocked when she followed her GPS navigator's directions – and nearly drowned in a river. She told the news network “I saw water hit my windshield and then looked around and realized I was in water.” Unable to open her car door or window, she called 911 immediately. The rescue team arrived quickly to pull the woman out of the wreck. In fact, when I had heard someone say something hurtful or rude to me, the GPS in my flesh would tell me to retaliate or say something really creepy back to this person, however, the Spirit will remind me not to fall into the trap of this temptation. Sinning dishonors God and causes people to stumble, and I will need to pay the consequences of it. How can we get the protection from sin and sinners?

Psalm Explanation

In Psalm 141, David not only asked God for protection from his enemy, he also presents his heart to God, because he knows that his heart is vulnerable. According to an Old Testament Scholar, Derek Kidner: Psalm 141 is a prayer against insincerity and compromise, and a plea for survival under the savage attacks, which such an attitude has invited.”

In addition, the great preacher of the early church John **Chrysostom** said this psalm was used in his time (A.D. 349-407) as part of the evening liturgy in the Greek Church, due to the reference in verse 2, was the evening sacrifice.

In its wording, the opening verse is characteristic of individual prayer. This individual lament is one of the 75 psalms that David wrote. While the exact context and background details of this Psalm can't be determined with full certainty, it was written by David during one of his many times of life distress. The particular contribution of this psalm is its earnest prayer for God to protect the faithful person against all insincerity and compromise in the midst of the enemies attacks. The overarching theme of David's prayer **in Psalm 141 is for deliverance and safekeeping from wicked men.**

The Psalmist's prayer in v. 2 is pictured as an offering to YHWH, carefully prepared. the Hebrew word of incense in this text is likely to refer to the odor of burning sacrifices, not specifically to an incense offering.

Verses 3-6 are the heart of this psalm. The psalmist asks God to keep him from “sinning with the tongue” because of the temptation indicated in v.4. The request of v. 3, **set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth, keep watch over the door of my lips,** is to be taken in that light: it is a prayer that God would protect the psalmist from playing along with schemers in speech who betray the Lord. While the faithful person will accept correction from the other righteous man, his prayer is continually against the evil deeds of the schemers.

This psalm has used the **simile of different human body parts**: hands, tongue, heart, head, bones, and eyes to represent the whole person. Dr. Warren W. Wiersbe explains, “Even a casual reading of [Psalm] 140 and 141 reveals that the two are related and use a similar vocabulary—The enemy was after David again and he needed immediate help. . . . This psalm reveals David making a number of **wise decisions** as he faced the attacks of the enemy.”[2]

The connection between the psalmist's trouble (v.5) and the downfall of “their judges” suggests that these judges perverted justice. This close connection between the last clause of verse 5 and 6 is confirmed by the **chiasm**

structure in this passage: the relation between “my words” and “being thrown over” (v.6) is the same as that between “my prayer” and “their evil deeds” (v.5).

The final part of the psalm shows the distress of the community, as well as the psalter’s solidarity with his people and his sense of being in danger. **The Hebrew words of verses 6-7 are very difficult to translate.** The ESV text renders the main point: eventually, God will bring his judgment upon the judges – the ungodly schemers; then the faithful person will be vindicated, and the unfaithful might even learn wisdom (they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant). **V. 8-9 : is a new orientation of a lament – where the Psalmist anchors his trust on God even in times of distress.**

This prayer reveals great insight into how a person in these circumstances would actually feel. David wanted to be a righteous man. He lamented to God that he was being torn between living solely for God and desiring to commit wickedness. This is a common struggle we as Christians face. Here David gives us an example as how we should pray:

1. **Pray for Protection from Sin**

As the psalm begins the first thing to note is the urgency of David’s prayer. He prays and asks for God to come quickly to his aid. Then, David asks his prayer may be seen as the sweet incense that rises before the altar of the Lord, as the evening sacrifice.

V. 3 While we don’t know the specifics of David’s situation, it’s clear that he felt the temptation to sin with his words, and so he asks for God’s help. The imagery is vivid, a guard being set to watch the doors of David’s lips. When somebody has done or said something hurtful to you, whether they are slandering or lying, so easily, we may let something come out of our own mouths, just damaging and hurtful. David understands this temptation:

James 3:7-8 -

For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

David understands the same danger so he prays to the Lord “Help my word to be honoring to you.

v. 4 He continues to pray

Do not let my heart incline to any evil, to busy myself with wicked deeds; in company with men who work iniquity, and let me not eat of their delicacies.

This is a very poetic way of saying that Lord, help me do not love the things they love – because whatever the wicked people run after could be very tempting and attractive, so he says “let me not eat of their delicacies”. Let me not run after the things they run after. David asks God to keep his heart from sinful influences and indulgences.

Similarly, we are wise to keep a close watch on the desires of our hearts and to ask for God’s help in our areas of weakness.

2. **Pray for Godly Accountability in the Fight Against Sin (141:5-7)**

V. 5 – Let a righteous man strike me – it is kindness; let him rebuke me – it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it.

In Ancient times, pouring oil on each other's heads was a way of refreshing. It was considered a real way of blessing if a righteous man rebukes me, I consider it as someone pouring oil on my head, it is a blessing, and I will not refuse it. What David is saying is that for a brother to show him his sin is **kindness**, the Hebrew word is (**hesed**) to him. Godly accountability is a good gift for those who gladly receive it. A person who welcomes a godly rebuke is wise, but the person who rejects it brings harm to himself.

We see that David made himself accountable to others. There should be those in your life who will hold you accountable.

In Proverbs 27:6 we read, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend, / But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful."

(Charles Spurgeon) once said "Depend upon it, the man who will tell you your faults is your best friend. It may not be a pleasant thing for him to do it, and he knows that he is running the risk of losing your friendship, but he is a true and sincere friend, therefore thank him for his reproof, and learn how you may improve by what he tells you."

Furthermore, In vs 6-7 David uses an illustration of dying in warfare. In biblical times, victorious armies sometimes killed their enemies by throwing them off of a large rock or a cliff. David looks forward to the time "when their judges (his enemies) are thrown over the cliff, then they (i.e. the people) shall hear my words, for they are pleasant. **Note that David was not cold-hearted rejoicing over the death of his enemies; rather, he was looking forward to deliverance from them.**

3. Thirdly, Pray for your Confidence in God (141:8-10)

In v. 8 the text turns back to the 1st person singular. Here are two words, "God, my Lord", indicates that David put his hope in the covenant God. V. 9 to 10, here are three words that mean the same: snares, traps, and nets. This metaphor is employed to give a notion: the evildoers will fall victim to their own plots.

The final three verses of this psalm speak of David's confidence in eventual deliverance. In Ps. 141:8 David boldly declared his confidence in God. David knew that the secret to persevering in trials is to fix one's eyes upon the Lord—not upon oneself, one's circumstances, or other men. In Ps. 141:9–10 David made two complementary requests. First, he asked that he not fall into his enemies' traps (cf. 1 Sam. 18:21). Second, and conversely, David prayed that his enemies might fall into their own traps. Observe David's methodology in this psalm. While external trials were surely the pressing need that sparked David to write this psalm, he did not actually ask for victory over his enemies until the final verse (Ps. 141:9–10). Indeed, David's focus in this psalm is to rightly order his own relationship with God.

Billy Graham once said, "Wealth can be taken away and you've lost nothing. Health can be taken away and you've lost something. The character can be taken away and you've lost everything." The psalmist realizes that, that in this trial, the only thing at stake is not surviving the assaults of evil men; his own character is at stake, his integrity is at stake, his fidelity is at stake, and he's praying to the Lord not only to save him from evil men but **to save him from evil me**. I invite you into this psalm, then, how do we deal with hurtful words?

- Pray for God's protection from Sin – pray for those who have hurt you intentionally and unintentionally by name, pray their name out loud even if it's hard, and pray for God to soften your heart, and guard your heart from it. Pray for strength to offer forgiveness, even when it doesn't feel warranted.
- Pray for Godly accountability against Sin – Accountability is a constant reminder that we need God's grace daily to live for him in our time and Culture. whenever anything is said which finds fault with you, receive it humbly and tenderly, asking God whether it may or may not contain a message from God.
- Last but not least, pray for confidence in God – resolve to focus our eyes on Jesus, trust the Lord that he is the one who can keep us from the enemies' trap and lead us to safety, and victory!