PSALMS
Chapter 141

Give Ear to My Voice

A Psalm of David.

O LORD, I call upon you; hasten to me! Give ear to my voice when I call to you! 2 Let my prayer be counted as incense before you, and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice! 3 Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips! 4 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! 5 Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it. Yet my prayer is continually against their evil deeds. 6 When their judges are thrown over the cliff, then they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant. 7 As when one plows and breaks up the earth, so shall our bones be scattered at the mouth of Sheol. 8 But my eyes are toward you, O GOD, my Lord; in you I seek refuge; leave me not defenseless! 9 Keep me from the trap that they have laid for me and from the snares of evildoers! 10 Let the wicked fall into their own nets, while I pass by safely.

Ps 141 A prayer for deliverance from the wicked and their evil ways. The stanza structure of the first half (two Hebrew lines plus three lines) is repeated in the second half, while at the center a couplet develops a complementary theme (see note on v. 5). Like Ps 140, the prayer is profuse in its physiological allusions: hands, mouth, lips, heart, head, bones, eyes. (CSB)

May reflect the time when David, driven out of Jerusalem by his son Absalom, could not worship on Mount Zion, where sacrifices were held. Yet, he associates his prayers with the evening service, with its incense and sacrifices (v 2).

> Format: Vv 1–2, O Lord, listen; vv 3–4, guard me from wickedness; vv 5–7, contrast between the righteous and the wicked; vv 8–10, God, the refuge. (TLSB)

The 141st psalm is a psalm of prayer. The psalmist prays that he may be preserved from the ungodly teachers, who appear to be friendly and speak with smooth words when threats do not work. It is better for me (he says) that righteous teachers rebuke me and condemn my righteousness, than that the godly praise me.

And if, in the meantime, evil comes upon me and I suffer cross and death and I am uprooted and torn apart, still it is better for me to trust in the Lord. Their hypocrisy will finally break their neck on a rock, that is, be suddenly overthrown and come to an evil end. Then they will see how bitter is their sweet teaching and how precious is my sour doctrine. Their own doctrine, is which they are caught as in a net, will bring them down, while I pass by in safety. (Reading the Psalms with Luther)

141:1–2 Initial appeal for God to hear. (CSB)

In his opening appeal David compares his prayer to incense and to the sacrifices which were offered to the Lord in the Lord. (PBC)

141:2 *as incense*. Clouds of fragrant incense rise to the heavens, signifying prayers pleasing to God. (TLSB)

lifting up of my hands. A posture of prayer. (TLSB)

evening sacrifice! Incense was mixed with the grain that was burned as part of the final sacrifice of the day (Lv 2:1–11). The external details of worship are related to personal prayers of the worshiper. (TLSB)

141:3–4 A plea that God will keep him from speaking, desiring or doing what is evil. (CSB)

mouth … heart. The mouth reveals what is in the heart (cf Mt 15:18–19; Rm 10:8–10; Ps 19:14; 49:3). (TLSB)

Sins of speech receive special emphasis in the Bible because they are so difficult to avoid and because they so often lead to other sins and to greater strife. (PBC)

141:3 Asks God to prevent bad speech from coming out of his mouth, like a guard regulating who passes through a door. (TLSB)

141:4 *Let not my heart.* Keep me from yielding to the example and urgings of the wicked (see Pr 1:10–16). (CSB)

men who work iniquity. Psalmist prays for delivery from the temptations that come from keeping company with people engaged in sin. (TLSB)

their delicacies. The luxuriant tables the wicked set from their unjust gains—keep me from acquiring an appetite for such unholy dainties. (CSB)

Sensual pleasures that sin can offer. (TLSB)

141:5 The center of the poem. (CSB)

Let a righteous man strike me. The disciplining blows and rebukes of the righteous are the true "kindness" (Hebrew *ḥesed*, meaning "love" or "acts of authentic friendship"; see Pr 27:6). (CSB)

Better to be chastised by a good person than praised by a bad one. Even severe admonitions from a fellow believer should be welcomed because they help keep us from sin. (TLSB)

One of the most important ways in which the Lord guards our lives from sin is through the admonition and encouragement we receive from fellow Christians. (PBC)

oil for my head. See note on 23:5. – Customary treatment of an honored guest at a banquet. (CSB)

The rebuke is soothing, healing, an anointing that contributes to sanctification. (TLSB)

My head … evil deeds. Perhaps better: "Let my head not refuse it (this 'oil' from the righteous), for my prayer is still against their (the wicked's) evil deeds." (CSB)

141:6–7 The destiny of the wicked. (CSB)

141:6 When authorities who govern evil people are overthrown—casting off a cliff being an ancient means of execution, sometimes called "stoning" (cf Ac 4:29)—they will appreciate what the psalmist is saying. (TLSB)

my words. Of commitment to righteousness, as in vv. 3–5. (CSB)

141:7 In physical death, our bones are scattered above the realm of the dead. But our death and burial are like plowing a field in preparation for the new life to rise from the earth (1Co 15:42–44). (TLSB)

141:8–10 A plea that God will deliver from the designs of the wicked. (CSB)

May evildoers fall into their own traps, while the righteous escape from them. (TLSB)

David is determined to practice and to encourage what is good. He is equally determined to oppose evil and evildoers. (PBC)

141:9 *trap… snares.* Perhaps, as usual, the plots of men to bring him down (as in 38:12; 64:5; 91:3; 140:5; 142:3)—but here reference may be to the enticements to evil that the wicked lay before him (see Ex 23:33; Dt 7:16; Jos 23:13; Jdg 2:3). (CSB)

Ps 141 Sinners will fall into the traps they have made for themselves and will ultimately be cast down. God, through the Office of the Ministry and other authorities, rebukes us for our sins. These are all to bring us to repentance. The "evening sacrifice" (v 2) of Christ's final atonement for sin makes our prayers acceptable before God. In Him, we will "pass by" (v 10) the snares and punishments of the wicked, and He will be our refuge. • O Lord, keep me from sinning! Guard my mouth, lest I say something I should not. Keep me away from people who would lead me into sin. Make me open to correction and utterly dependent on Your grace in Christ. Amen. (TLSB)