

Psalms 141:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities.

Analysis

Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head: for yet my prayer also shall be in their calamities. This verse expresses remarkable openness to correction from godly people. **"Let the righteous smite me"** (יְהַלְמֵנִי-טָדֹב/yehelemeni-tsaddiq chesed) welcomes rebuke from those walking uprightly. Halam means to strike or beat, suggesting forceful correction, yet the psalmist calls it **"kindness"** (טָדֹב/chesed)—covenant loyalty, faithful love. True friends wound for our good (Proverbs 27:6).

"Let him reprove me" (וַיְיַכְנֵנִי/veyokhicheni) uses יָכַח (yakach), to correct, convince, or reason with. This isn't casual advice but pointed confrontation exposing sin or error. The psalmist compares it to **"excellent oil"** (שֶׁמֶן רֹאשׁ/shemen rosh)—literally "oil of the head," finest anointing oil bringing honor and blessing. What feels harsh (smiting, reproof) is actually precious anointing.

"Which shall not break my head" (אֶל-יָנִי רֹאשִׁי/al-yani roshi) contrasts godly correction (which heals) with false flattery or wicked influence (which destroys). Some interpret יָנִי (yani) as "refuse" rather than "break"—the psalmist won't refuse correction. Either way, the point stands: righteous reproof benefits, while rejecting it harms. The verse concludes with commitment to pray even for those who correct him, demonstrating grace and humility.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern honor-shame cultures valued reputation and face-saving, making public correction painful. Yet biblical wisdom literature consistently celebrates teachability and correction (Proverbs 9:8, 12:1, 13:18, 15:31-32, 25:12). The comparison to anointing oil recalls special significance—anointing designated kings, priests, and prophets for holy service. To accept correction is to receive consecration for God's purposes. Early church fathers cited this verse as model for spiritual direction and fraternal correction within Christian community.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. Who are the 'righteous' people in your life positioned to offer correction, and how can you cultivate openness to their reproof?
2. How can you distinguish between godly correction (which builds up) and destructive criticism (which tears down)?
3. What does it mean practically to pray 'in their calamities'—interceding for those who correct you? How does this display Christlike humility?

Interlinear Text

יְהַלְמֵנִי	צַדִּיק	חֵסֶד	וְיֹכִיחַ נִי	שֶׁן
smite	Let the righteous	me it shall be a kindness	and let him reprove	oil
H1986	H6662	H2617	H3198	H8081
רָאשׁ י	אֵל	יִגַּל	רָאשׁ י	
me it shall be an excellent	H408	which shall not break	me it shall be an excellent	
H7218		H5106	H7218	
כִּי	עַד	וְתַפִּלָּתִי	בְּרָעוֹתֵיהֶם:	
H3588	H5750	for yet my prayer	also shall be in their calamities	
		H8605	H7451	

Additional Cross-References

Ecclesiastes 7:5 (Parallel theme): It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.

Revelation 3:19 (Parallel theme): As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Galatians 6:1 (Parallel theme): Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Proverbs 25:12 (Parallel theme): As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear.

Proverbs 19:25 (Parallel theme): Smite a scorner, and the simple will beware: and reprove one that hath understanding, and he will understand knowledge.

Proverbs 6:23 (Parallel theme): For the commandment is a lamp; and the law is light; and reproofs of instruction are the way of life:

Proverbs 15:5 (Parallel theme): A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but he that regardeth reproof is prudent.

Matthew 5:44 (Prayer): But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

2 Chronicles 25:16 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass, as he talked with him, that the king said unto him, Art thou made of the king's counsel? forbear; why shouldest thou be smitten? Then the prophet forbore, and said, I know that God hath determined to destroy thee, because thou hast done this, and hast not hearkened unto my counsel.

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