This preposition, like the English "for," — which is throughout its best representative, and which I shall here use in its stead — has a remarkable variety of meanings, or rather of divergent applications. For examples: "Christ died for us," and, "for our sins," a very different relation; and so again, "pray for them that persecute you," and, "we pray you for Christ"; and again, "praying for you," and, "giving thanks for you," and "giving thanks for all things." But amidst all this variety, one negative rule may be noted in passing: this preposition is never employed before a word designating what is conceived merely as existing uncertainly in the future, as an object of desire or hope. It seems always to refer to a datum or ground to rest upon. We may give thanks not only for (νπέρ) persons but for (νπέρ) things which have been received, Eph. v. 20. But, while we may pray for (νπέρ) persons, this preposition is never used in praying for a thing desired, as for grace, or faith, or daily bread.

It may also be observed in passing, that, in the expressions, "my body given for you," "my blood shed for you," both St. Luke and St. Paul use νπέρ; but St. Matthew uses the sacrificial περί, the preposition which the Septuagint almost always use to express atonement for; St. Mark too uses νπέρ, which Lachmann changes to περί. In Romans viii. 3 we have περί, where the authorized version translates, "sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin" — Marg. "by a sacrifice for sin"; and the revised version reads, "as an offering for sin."

I proceed now to show that this preposition νπέρ in the New Testament, just like the English for, may mean, and sometimes must mean, "instead of," a sense which is not unknown in classical Greek. "That one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." Here is life for life, — dying for the people's good, no doubt, but also in their stead, that they might not perish. So also, "who for my life laid down their own necks." So also, and still more clearly, "Who gave himself a ransom for all" (ἀντιλυτρῶν νπέρ), i Tim. ii. 6; for which our Lord had said unequivocally λυτρῶν ἀντὶ πολλῶν, "a ransom instead of many."

In 2 Cor. v. 20, νπέρ can scarcely mean anything else but "instead of": "For Christ, then, are we ambassadors,— we pray you for Christ," must mean "in his stead" or "as his representatives." It
cannot mean "in his behalf" in the sense of "for his good or behoof." The Apostle says: "For Christ we are ambassadors, as God did beseech you by us; we pray you for Christ."

And still more clearly, if possible, is this the meaning of ἐπὶ in Philemon 13: "That for thee he might minister to me"; where the authorized version puts "instead of," and the revisers substitute "in behalf of." What was their motive in making this change it is not easy to say. But, if they intended to avoid the sense "instead of," they egregiously missed their aim; for "in behalf of" often has this very meaning, as when a chairman of a committee puts his name to a report "in behalf of the committee," i.e., certainly not for their sake, or for their good or benefit, but as their representative or substitute, by their authority,—simply in their stead. And, without having recourse to the authority of translators or revisers or lexicons, it is plain on the face of this passage that St. Paul would have Onesimus minister to him, not for the sake, the good, the benefit of Philemon, but as his representative or substitute,—in his stead.

When St. Peter says, 1 Pet. ii. 21, "Christ suffered for us, just for unjust," the contrast can hardly fail to suggest the sense of substitution. For, if the sense be merely "for the sake of," "for the good of," then what is there strange or striking in the just suffering for the unjust? It would be still more remarkable if the unjust were to volunteer to suffer for the good of the unjust. Good men often labor and toil for the good of the criminal class, but criminals rarely trouble themselves about it. Besides, why should it be of any special advantage to the unjust that he who suffers, who dies, for them should himself be just? If the suffering of "just for unjust" has in it any point, it would seem necessarily to involve the idea of substitution,—of some value, worth, or merit of the just, set over against the unworthiness and demerit of the unjust.

Thus, I think, it has been shown that ἐπὶ (for) in the New Testament may mean, and sometimes must mean, "instead of." But it is never to be forgotten that, while the sense "instead of" does not exclude the sense "for the sake of" or "because of," no more do these last senses exclude that of "instead of"; so that all the passages in which Christ is said to suffer or die or shed his blood for our sins, while they mean "because of our sins," may also mean "because of, as being a sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction for our sins"; and those which speak of Christ as suffering, dying, or shedding his blood for us, while they mean "for our sake," and "for our good," may also mean "on our behalf," in the way of being our substitute and representative,—in our stead.