

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Pray On Behalf Of One Another

by Dan Trygg

“Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praises. ¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; ¹⁵ and the prayer of faith will restore the one who is weary, and the Lord will raise him up, and sins he may have done will be forgiven him. ¹⁶ Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray on behalf of one another so that you may be healed.” James 5:13-16

“Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, ¹⁴ while they also, by prayer on your behalf, yearn for you because of the surpassing grace of God in you.” 2 Corinthians 9:13-14

“I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, ⁴ always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer on behalf of you all...” Philippians 1:4

Someone has said that the most powerful insights concerning what is communicated in the Greek language come from observing the usage of its prepositions. This is certainly true with regard to prayer. The first observation to take note of is that **there are a variety of ways in which prayer for one another's benefit is described in the NT.** There is no set formulaic expression which is regularly used to describe our interaction with God for one another. **Here is a breakdown of the different Greek expressions used:**

(1.) *Epi* - translated as “over” in James 5:14 (“let them [i.e., the elders, or ‘the older ones’] pray *upon/over* him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord”), **the word generally means “on”, “upon”, or “on the surface of”,** with other more specific renderings dictated by context. There is a different Greek word, *hupo*, that generally means “over” or “above”. Since *this* passage is the only occurrence of *epi* in relation to prayer, it may have been chosen because it is descriptive of the situation, i.e., praying while applying or rubbing oil on a sick person. **Or, if the context is about a bedridden sick person, then “upon”, or “over” would be a very appropriate word choice, descriptive of the activity taking place.** It does not at all refer to any supposed superiority of status or power inherent in those praying for the weak person. It is merely descriptive of the physical relationship of them in regard to the one asking for help.

(2.) *Peri* - usually translated as praying “for” someone, it actually means to pray “about” or “concerning” them, or their situation. E.g., Lk. 22:32; Acts 8:15; 12:5; Rom 15:30; Eph. 6:18; Col. 4:3,12; I Tim. 2:1.

(3.) *Sun* - translated as “with” in Acts 20:36, it actually means “together-with”, emphasizing that they were *all* praying. They were “*co-pray-ers*”, or “*joint-participants in prayer*”. While this is the only incident where this particular preposition is used, the concept of praying together as partners is implied, or clearly taught, in other passages. E.g., Acts 12:12; 16:25; 21:5; Matt. 18:19,20 (In vs. 19, the word translated as “agree” is *sumphoneō*, a compound verb made from *sun* [“together-with”, “jointly”] and *phoneō* [“I call out”, “I speak loudly”, “I address”]. The combination means “to agree”, or literally “to speak jointly”. The English word, “symphony”, is a derivative from this compound Greek term.)

(4.) *Huper* - often also translated as “for”, this preposition literally means “on behalf of”, or “for the sake of”, someone else. E.g., II Cor. 9:14; Phil. 1:4; Jas. 5:16. **Our study today revolves around *this* word in James 5:16.**

In thinking about these prepositions, chosen to describe our relationships with each other in prayer, I was struck by the fact that **there is not any time where anyone is described as praying “down upon” someone else** (Greek word, *kata*). There is not any hint of a hierarchy of spirituality, or anything like a dispensing of a magical power from a “greater” to a “lesser” person, ...nothing at all similar to a “casting of a spell”, as would be used in witchcraft or magic, or as in some of the other pagan religions of the day. The power rests with *God*, not the individual. God is not a respecter of persons. **We all have equal access to the Father**, through the way opened by Jesus’ blood atonement on our behalf (Rom. 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12; Heb. 10:4-22). *We* are encouraged to “pray for *one another*”, not “go get the priest or the ‘holy man’ to pray for the needy person”. Clearly, prayer was not meant to be a “top-down” arrangement. It was meant to be “collegial”, i.e., we are equal participants interceding for one another, as the need arises. **I was also interested to discover that the Greek words *para* (meaning “alongside”, or “with”) and *meta* (“with”, “in company with”) were never employed in reference to prayer.** [The closest place that *meta* occurs in this fashion would be Matt. 26:37,38,40, where Jesus asks His disciples to “keep watch *with* Me”. Saying this, however, He *left* them to go off to pray *by Himself*.] **The absence of these terms could indicate that the NT writers saw prayer as more of an active role where everyone present participated.** You were not to just listen to someone *else* pray, as a passive spectator; you prayed *together-with* them. These are important observations, because **we need to be convinced that we are on-the-spot representatives of God where we are. When needs arise, we are to step up to pray and assist.** Our first response should be to get involved in the intercession itself, not pass it on to someone “more spiritual than I am”. Remember

that Jesus had said that it was to our advantage that *He* would go away? Why? Because He was able only to help in one space/time location. If He left, however, He would send *another* Helper, the Holy Spirit, who would be able to be with each one of us (Jn. 16:7). The “Holy-Spirit-and-us” is “more advantageous” than Jesus Himself. Of course, **if the Holy Spirit is present, but we are unwilling to be involved, then nothing will happen. He comes to help us, as we call upon Him and act in partnership with Him** (Rom. 8:26).

It is clear from the passages at the top of this study that **prayer for one another is an important privilege and responsibility**. The prophet Samuel, in the OT, saw it as a serious duty, “...far be it from me that I should sin against Yahweh by ceasing to pray for you...” (1 Sam. 12:23). We have it stated positively by James, “pray for one another”, and negatively by Samuel, it is “sin against the Lord” to not pray for His people. Why? Because **prayer is serious business. It has great and far-reaching effects, ...more than most of us could imagine**. James stated it clearly, “The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (NASB), or, “...has great power in its effects” (RSV) (Jas. 5:16). **In Ephesians 6, it is listed right along with the other implements of the armor of God**, “With all prayer and petition praying at all times in the Spirit, even towards this purpose, being alert with all perseverance and petition for (*peri*) all the saints,¹⁹ and on behalf of (*huper*) me, in order that utterance may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel” (vss. 18,19). **Paul saw that it was important to pray for the saints on every occasion**, being watchful and persistent in this. Paul asked also for intercession for himself, that he may be given the words to speak, and the boldness to speak them. Did you ever feel that way? **Did you ever feel like, “I don’t know what I would say?” Paul felt that way, too, but he asked the Holy Spirit to give him the words when he needed to speak out for Christ**. This is based upon Jesus’ own teaching, “...do not be anxious beforehand about what you will say, but say whatever is given you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but it is the Holy Spirit” (Mk. 13:11; cf. Jn. 15:26,27). In Romans 15:30,31 **the apostle asked the readers to “wrestle” along with him in prayers** to God on his behalf. He was well aware that he was going to a dangerous place, and **he understood how critical intercession would be for his safe passage, as well as for the success of his mission** (cf. II Cor. 1:10,11; Phil. 1:19). **The apostle Paul saw unremitting prayer as an outworking of unhyprocritical love** (Rom. 12:9-12). This makes sense, for **if we truly want God’s best for people, how can we not be interceding on their behalf?** Because of this, Paul could not help but give thanks for those he heard had become his brothers and sisters in Christ, **praying that they would come to a deeper intimacy with God, and a fuller understanding of who they are in Christ, what they have been called to, and what God has made available to them** for this important work (Eph. 1:16-19). Again, in Colossians 4:2-4, he exhorts the believers to “continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving, praying... that God will open to us a door for the word” and, “that I might make it clear.” So, **opportunities to proclaim Christ, and effective communication come in answer to prayer**. One of their members, Epaphras, was “wrestling fervently in his prayers” on their behalf, **praying that they might “stand fully-mature and having-been-fulfilled in all the will of God”** (Col. 4:12). That is a tall order, but prayer was a strategic part in bringing that about. **How much is lack of maturity, and lack of fulfillment of God’s call on peoples’ lives, in our day due to prayerlessness?** In NT times, there was a whole class of widows who devoted themselves to supplication and prayers day and night (I Tim. 5:5). I’m sure that the retirement circumstances of most people in our country are much more comfortable than what these women lived with, yet how many of our elderly devote themselves to pray for the church? **How many people do you know, of any age, who devote themselves to prayer and intercession, true wrestling and travailing with loud crying and tears** (cf. Heb. 5:7), **for the maturity of God’s people, and who cry out for revival and for God to raise up people to do all His will?** I have known a few, but they are few and far between. In Philemon 1:4-6, we see **Paul praying for Philemon in this way**. He prayed, “in order that the sharing of your faith might come to be effective/active/powerful in true-knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ.” **He was praying for revelation of what God had put within him, and the ability to powerfully put it to work in sharing his faith. This was an experiential, revelatory self-discovery that Paul recognized would only be made known in answer to prayer**. Are you praying for such an awareness of what God has placed in *you*, and how to effectively put it to work? Are you asking God to do that in the lives of *other believers* you know? The Bible *twice* says that “the eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous, and His ears are open to their entreaties” (I Pet. 3:12; Psa. 34:15). God is *watching* to see what you will do, and *listening* to hear what you will say to Him. That is a pretty amazing thing, isn’t it? **God says He is watching and listening to you and me. Will we respond in faith?** “Those who come to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Will we take Him up on His promise to answer prayer that is according to His will? **God calls us to “pray for one another”**. The “one another” is a reciprocal pronoun, meaning that I am to be praying for you, and you are to be praying for me. The action goes both ways. **“The inworking prayer of the righteous has great power in its effects.” How much do we miss out on, because we are not willing to ask?**