

Lesson 17

Deponent (Defective) Verbs

οὐδείς δύναται δυσὶ κυρίοις δουλεύειν No one can serve two masters. Matthew 6:24

125. Deponent Verbs. The term “deponent” describes some verbs in Greek which are either middle or passive in form but are active in meaning and are to be so translated. The name “deponent” is used because the early grammarians considered such as having laid aside their active meaning (Latin de pone, I lay aside).

The term “defective” refers to verbs which do not have a full component of forms. Hence verbs like δύναμαι (I am able) are termed defective because they lack the active form.

How can one tell if a verb form in the middle or actually middle? The answer is by looking in the vocabulary or lexicon. If the verb is cited in an –ομαι form, then the verb is deponent at least in the present system (present and imperfect tenses). If the present is deponent, the imperfect will be also. γίνεσθαι (to become) is middle infinitive in form, but is active in meaning. The imperfect ἐγινόμην would be active in meaning also.

However, one must not assume that because the verb is deponent in the present system all other tenses will be. Verbs which are regular in the present may often be deponent in the future, and a deponent present may take its other principal parts in regular active forms. Cf. ἔρχομαι (I come), ἐλεύσομαι (I shall come), ἦλθον (I came), ἐλήλυθα, (I have come). Of the four, only two are deponent.

A deeper study of deponent verbs will show that most of the active translations usually rose out of a true middle meaning. See Rutherford, First Greek Grammar, pp. 273-277.

Where these verbs demand a passive meaning, it may be supplied by the aorist (which has a separate passive voice from the middle) or by a periphrastic construction with ἔχειν τυγχάνω (e.g., τύχωσιν σωτηρίας, attain salvation = be saved). A few verbs may actually be used in both a middle (deponent active) and in an active sense. Cf. ἰάεται (She is healed), Mark 5:29.

126. The Negative μή. The negative μή is generally used with infinitives, participles, and the moods other than the indicative. οὐ (κ, χ) is to be used generally with the indicative.

ἐγὼ δὲ λέγω ὑμῖν μὴ ἀντιστῆναι τῷ πονηρῷ But I tell you not to resist evil. Matthew 5:39

127. Impersonal Verbs. Some verbs may affirm their action of no definite person or thing, the subject of the action being unspecified. This is true of English verbs like It rains, There is a fight, It is necessary, or It is possible. “It” and “there” in these sentences are called “expletives” because they merely “fill up” the place of the subject. In Greek such verbs are common and often take an infinitive to complete their meaning.

δύναται ἔρχεσθαι, It is possible to go.
δεῖ προσκυνεῖν, It is necessary to worship.

128. Vocabulary.

ἀρχή, ἡς, ἡ,	<u>beginning, rule</u>	δωρεά, ᾶς, ἡ,	<u>gift</u>
ἀντλέω,	<u>I draw</u> (water)	ἔρχομαι,	<u>I go, I come</u>
ἀπέρχομαι,	<u>I go away</u>	εἰσέρχομαι,	<u>I go in, enter</u>
ἀποκρίνομαι	<u>I answer</u> (may take dat.)	καθέζομαι,	<u>I sit</u>
γίνομαι,	<u>I become</u>	κάθημαι,	<u>I sit</u>
γυνή, ἡ,	<u>woman</u> (3rd. decl.)	οἶκος, ου, ὁ	<u>house household</u>
δεῖ,	<u>it is necessary</u> impersonal δέω	πηγή, ἡς, ἡ,	<u>well</u> (water well)
δέχομαι,	<u>I receive</u>	προσέρχομαι,	<u>I go to</u>
διέρχομαι,	<u>I go through</u>	προσκυνέω,	<u>I worship</u> (may take dat.)
δοῦλος, ου, ὁ	<u>servant, slave</u>	τροφή, ἡς, ἡ,	<u>food, provisions</u>
δύναμαι,	<u>I am able; it is possible</u> (impersonal)		

129. Exercises.I. Text A.

ἔδει δὲ αὐτὸν διέρχεσθαι διὰ τῆς Σαμαρείας. ἔρχεται οὖν εἰς Συχάρ. ἐκαθέζετο ἐπὶ τῇ πηγῇ. οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἀπήρχοντο ἀγοράζειν τροφᾶς. γυνὴ προσέρχεται τὴν πηγὴν. ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀποκρίνεται αὐτῇ καὶ διδάσκει αὐτὴν περὶ τῆς δωρεᾶς τοῦ θεοῦ. ἡρώτα αὐτὸν πῶς δύναται ἀντλεῖν. ἡ γυνὴ καὶ ἡρώτα αὐτὸν περὶ τοῦ τόπου προσκυνεῖν. ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀπεκρίνετο ὅτι ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐστὶν ὁ τόπος ὅπου προσκυνεῖν δεῖ· ἀλλ' ὅτι δεῖ προσκυνεῖν ἐν πνεύματι (spirit) καὶ ἀληθεῖα. ἡ γυνὴ λέγει ὅτι Μεσσίας ἔρχεται. ὁ δὲ λέγει ἐγὼ εἰμι. ἡ γυνὴ ἀπέρχεται καὶ λέγει τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐξέρχεσθαι. ἤρχοντο πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ ἐδέχοντο αὐτὸν. καὶ πολλοὶ ἐπίστευον εἰς αὐτόν.

II. Text B.

1. γινωσκόμεθα, γινόμεθα, πιστεύειν, πιστεύεσθαι, δέχεσθαι.
2. ἔρχεσθε, ἐξέρχεσθε, ἐξήρχεσθε, ἀπηρχόμεθα, διερχέσθαι.
3. οὐ δύνασθε θεῶ δουλεύειν καὶ Μαμωνᾶ (Section 36).
4. εἰσήρχετο εἰς τὸν οἶκον μετὰ τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκεῖ ἐκάθητο μετ' αὐτῶν.
5. οἱ μαθηταὶ οὐ δύναται δέχεσθαι τροφᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ οἴκου.
6. ἡ γυνὴ ἐξέρχεται πρὸς τὴν πηγὴν ἀντλεῖν.
7. ἐν ἀρχῇ ὁ κόσμος ἐγένετο δι' αὐτοῦ.
8. δεῖ δέχεσθαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ χριστοῦ καὶ γίνεσθαι οἱ δοῦλοι αὐτοῦ.
9. ἀπεκρίνετο αὐτῇ οὐ γινώσκετε τί (what) προσκυνεῖτε.
10. ὁ προφήτης ἡρώτα αὐτὸν μὴ ἔρχεσθαι.

III. Translate.

1. You are not able to enter the kingdom of heaven.
2. It is necessary to receive the gifts of the servants in the house.
3. We, ourselves, are about to become servants of God.
4. This woman was answering, “Are you able to draw from the well?”
5. These men were coming unto Jesus and were believing on (εἰς) him.
6. Another comes and you receive his teaching, but you are not able to receive my teaching.

Special Note Concerning the Deponent Verbs

Wayne Price, a former student of Dr. Roberts and my much appreciated editorial assistant, sent me the following note on April 11, 2006:

Due to the study of the Fribergs and others, I usually include the following disclaimer in regard to the 1st paragraph on Lesson 17: “However there are a growing number of scholars who would disagree with this definition given in the 1st paragraph. We studied the Greek “middle voice” back in Lesson 8 of Robert’s Greek Grammar, and there we learned that it conveys the idea that the subject of a sentence is doing something for itself. Usually these verbs have an active form, and the middle voice is derived from it; that is, they simply take that active form and put the –ομαι endings on the verb.

However, there is a class of Greek verbs which probably never had an active voice at all. These are labeled as “deponent” by most grammarians, and defined as “middle or passive in form, but having an active meaning.” I have begun to lean toward the idea that these “so-called” deponent verbs can be explained as true middles, i.e., they never really lost their “middle” idea at all! The subject may still be viewed as the center of the verb’s action, or at last involved in that center.

At least allow for that possibility as we study these types of verbs, usually styled as deponent verbs by most grammarians”

Corrected 4/17/06