

# Divine Passive

## DIVINE PASSIVE DIVINE PRODUCTION

In simple terms, the "DIVINE PASSIVE" refers to the use of a Greek verb in the [passive voice](#) which in [context](#) implies (or sometimes directly states) that the action or effect of the verb is produced by God ("DIVINE PRODUCTION"), most often implying the Holy Spirit. In short the **DIVINE PASSIVE** indicates that God is the DOER or DIVINE PRODUCER of an action or an effect described in the passage. In 2 Corinthians 12:4 Paul where "was caught up ([harpazo](#) in [aorist tense, passive voice](#)) into Paradise" the passive is a **DIVINE PASSIVE** for it is clear that God is the One Who "raptured" Paul!

In another example in Hebrews 10:10+ we read "By this will we **have been sanctified** ([hagiazo](#) in the [perfect tense](#) and [passive voice](#)) through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." Here the [passive voice](#) is the **DIVINE PASSIVE** and begs the question, Who sanctified us. From other passages we see this once for all time sanctification (which equates with Justification or [Past Tense Salvation](#)) is produced "by the sanctifying work of the Spirit." (1 Peter 1:2+, cf 2 Th 2:13)

In Hebrews 10:14+ we read "by one offering He has perfected ([teleioo](#) in [perfect tense](#) = [past tense salvation](#) = Justification) for all time those who **are sanctified** ([present tense](#) and [passive voice](#) = "continually being sanctified" = [present tense salvation](#))." This begs the question by Whom are we continually being **sanctified**? Clearly the "Agent" Who is effecting this "holy result" ([progressive sanctification](#)) is the Holy Spirit. Hebrews 10:14+ is thus a clear example of the "Divine Passive" which pictures God the Spirit behind the scenes controlling the scenes He is behind! As one person wrote "The verb may be in the [passive voice](#), but God is anything but passive!"

Another strategically important example of the **Divine Passive** is found in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost, the day marking the birth of the Church, Luke records "they were all **filled with** ([aorist tense, passive voice](#)) the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." (Acts 2:4+) Observe that the "Agent" Who is producing the "filling" is clearly stated as the Holy Spirit. Notice also that in Acts 2 the effect of the **Divine Passive** is "**Divine Production**," or production of a supernatural effect (speak with other tongues), something these men could not have done in their own natural power. In a related example in Acts 4:8+ "Peter **filled with** ([aorist tense, passive voice](#) = **divine passive**) with the Holy Spirit" spoke boldly to the Jewish leaders.

Here is another example of the **Divine Passive** in Acts in which one can see the "**Divine Production**." Luke writes Peter (Acts 3:4+) "seizing him (lame man - Acts 3:2+) by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles **were strengthened** ([aorist tense, passive voice](#))." (Acts 3:7+). In this case the "**Divine Production**" associated with the **Divine Passive** was immediate healing and ability to walk. So as in Acts 2 and Acts 3, the **Divine Passive** is associated with **Divine Production** or supernatural effects.

In the example in Hebrews 10:10+, the effect of the **Divine Passive** work of the Spirit is not as obvious as with the examples in Acts, because [progressive sanctification](#) or daily growth in Christlikeness produced by the Spirit usually occurs over an extended period of time and is not as dramatic as speaking in tongues, speaking with boldness or walking after being healed. However, over time the **Divine Production** associated with the **Divine Passive** should become obvious to others as they witness our transformed life.

In a related example of the **Divine Passive** Paul explains that we (believers) are "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord (His Word), and are **being** ([present tense passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive** = "continually being") **transformed** ([metamorphoo](#) = a process by which what is changing on the inside of a believer progressively shows forth on the outside so that others can see) into the same image (THE IMAGE OF CHRIST) from glory to glory (synonymous with progressive sanctification), just as from the Lord, the Spirit. (2 Cor 3:18+). And so in 2 Cor 3:18+ the "Agent" Who produces the change from glory to glory is the Holy Spirit using the Holy Word. As an aside, do you see why it is so vital that we are in the Word daily so that it might get into us and give the Spirit the opportunity to use it to transform us (cf Mt 4:4+)? Peter emphasizes this important principle in 1 Peter 2:2+ commanding us "like newborn babies, **long for** ([aorist imperative](#)) the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation (aka progressive sanctification)." Notice the clear conclusion. No intake of the pure milk of the Word (where "pure" means not devotionals, not sermons but the living and active Word - Heb 4:12+) results in NO SPIRITUAL GROWTH, no growth in Christlikeness, no progressive sanctification. Progressive sanctification is not like treading water -- you can't expect to remain at the same stage of spiritual maturity (sanctification) if you are not regularly imbibing the pure milk of the Word - No Word. No growth. Know Word. Know growth!

Another important example of the **Divine Passive** is found in Galatians 5:18+ Paul writing "if you are led ([present tense](#) and [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive** = "continually being led") by the Spirit, you are not under the Law." It is important to understand that the **Divine Passive** is not teaching we as believers are simply to "Let go and let God." That is a false, non-Scriptural teaching. More

accurately, it is "Let God and let's go!" And so here in Galatians 5:18 [±](#) the implication is that we must submit/surrender (our responsibility) to the Spirit's leading and the Spirit then actively, personally guides us, the [present tense](#) ("you are being led") indicating that this guidance is the Spirit's ongoing activity. This important truth is repeated in Romans 8 Paul writing "For all who **are being led** ([present tense](#) and [passive voice](#), the **Divine Passive** = "continually being led") by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." (Ro 8:14<sup>±</sup>) This is an important truth because the fact that we are being led by the Spirit serves as strong evidence of one's divine sonship! And in the immediate context this "being led" is in turn manifest by "putting to death the deeds of the body." (Ro 8:13<sup>±</sup>). In other words, if we claim to be Christ followers, sons of God, and yet we exhibit no inclination (or power) to put to death the sinful deeds of the flesh, it is very likely we are not genuine believers but simply professors! And so we see the importance of the **Divine Passive** in our daily sanctification (progressive sanctification) and in demonstration of the authenticity of our salvation!

In sum when the passive voice indicates that God is the stated or unstated but assumed Agent of an action (Divine Production) the passive voice is known as the Divine Passive.

#### Related Resource:

- [Three Tenses of Salvation](#)
- Progressive sanctification

#### S. Greidanus gives some historical context for the use of the **Divine Passive** -

A final literary feature of some weight for interpreting and preaching the Gospels is known as the "**divine passive**," that is, the use of the [passive voice](#) of the verb "to denote the hidden action of God as the Agent responsible for the activity." Martin explains that this usage of the passive began "as a reverential way of avoiding the use of the sacred name of God," was next picked up in apocalyptic literature, and then became customary so that we find Jesus using it over 100 times. Just as we can substitute "kingdom of God" for Matthew's "kingdom of heaven," therefore, we ought mentally to add the name of God whenever we hear a "**divine passive**": "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted [by God]" (Mt 5:4); "Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered [by God]" (Luke 12:7+). Although these examples are obvious, the addition clarifies the theocentric focus of these sayings. Moreover, sometimes these additions will clarify the author's intentions. For example, we find the passive in Mark 1:14+: "Now after John was arrested [literally, "handed over," by God], Jesus came." Martin observes that "Mark's intention is to suggest a deliberate parallel between John's fate and the destiny of the Son of man who will at last be delivered by God into the hands of sinners (Mk. 9:31, Mk 14:41)." (The Modern Preacher)

## A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE DIVINE PASSIVE

Mark 2:5+ And Jesus seeing their faith \*said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins **are forgiven** ([present tense](#), [passive voice](#) = "continually forgiven" = **Divine Passive**)."

**Cornerstone Bible Commentary** - This remark got Jesus into trouble with the theologians. In spite of the fact that it is expressed as a **divine passive** that attributes forgiveness to God (see Lev 4:26, 31; 2 Sam 12:13)

Matthew 7:1<sup>±</sup> "**Do not judge** ([present imperative with a negative](#)) so that you **will not be judged** ([krino](#) in the [aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**).

**Cornerstone Bible Commentary** - This is a "divine passive," referring to God's judgment on the last day. God alone can make ultimate judgments about people (cf. Mt 13:36-43, 47-50).

Matthew 8:12 but the sons of the kingdom **will be cast out** ([passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**) into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 20:18 "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man **will be delivered** ([passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**) to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death

**Comment** - This use of the divine passive is interesting as while it clearly is a divine passive, it is Judas Iscariot who was used as God's instrument of betrayal of His Son. This is indeed mysterious, but is confirmed by another use of the divine passive by Peter who declared that God's Son was "**delivered over** ([passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**) by the **predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by

the hands of godless men and put Him to death." (Acts 2:23+)

Matthew 27:51-53 And **behold**, the veil of the temple **was torn** ([aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**) in two from top to bottom; and the earth **shook** ([aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**) and the rocks **were split** ([aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**). 52 The tombs **were opened** ([aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**), and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep **were raised** ([aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**); 53 and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared (literally = were manifest) ([aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**) to many.

**Comment** - Note 5 successive and/or simultaneous supernatural events all wrought by God Almighty. He torn the curtain, shook the earth, split the rocks, opened the tombs, raised the dead, who were made to be manifest (appeared)! While one might surmise that "appeared" is not a divine passive, for these risen dead, now living could "appear" themselves by their own act, their own volition, the verb appear is passive voice and so the idea is more literally they were "made to be manifest." Who made them manifest? God made them manifest.

Matthew 28:18 And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority **has been given** ([aphiemi](#) in the [aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**) to Me in heaven and on earth.

**Comment** - Who gave Jesus that authority? God the Father and so it is clearly a divine passive. (cf the Father's decree regarding His Son in Ps 2:6-9, 1 Cor 15:27 where "HE HAS PUT" is God the Father, Eph 1:20-22+, Heb 1:2+, 1 Pe 3:22+) Mt 11:27 affirms this truth, Jesus declaring "All things **have been handed over** to Me by My Father" where have been handed over is [aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) and clearly another **Divine Passive**

Acts 28:28+ "Therefore let it be known to you that this salvation of God **has been sent** ([apostello](#) in the [aorist tense](#), [passive voice](#) = **Divine Passive**) to the Gentiles; they will also listen."

**Cornerstone Bible Commentary** - The book of Acts climaxes with Paul's declaration through a divine passive that "this salvation from God has also been offered to the Gentiles" (Acts 28:28, cf. *apostellō*, literally, this salvation "has been sent").

As you can see, the divine passive is very common in the New Testament, which should not surprise us since we know God is Sovereign and always behind the scenes, in control of the scenes He is behind! As you read the Scriptures, be alert to the use of the divine passive and let it be a reminder and an encouragement that no matter what you are experiencing personally our Mighty God is still on the throne, still in control of every event in our life. Thank You Father for the manifold uses of the "divine passive" that undergird our faith in Your Sovereignty through Your Spirit and in the Name of Your Son. Amen.