

# 1 Corinthians 12:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?

## Analysis

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**If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling?**—Paul pushes the absurdity to comic extremes: imagine a body composed entirely of one gigantic eyeball—it could see but not hear, smell, taste, or touch. Such a creature would be grotesquely deformed, severely handicapped. The rhetorical question (pou, "where?") emphasizes the loss: the other senses would simply not exist.

Application: if the whole church were prophets, who would administer? If all were evangelists, who would shepherd? If everyone taught, who would listen and learn? Uniformity produces dysfunction. The Corinthians' desire for everyone to possess the prestigious gift (tongues) would create a monstrous church-body. God's wisdom in diverse distribution ensures the body has eyes to see, ears to hear, hands to work, feet to go—all functions necessary for kingdom mission. The church needs contemplatives and activists, teachers and doers, visionaries and administrators.

## Historical Context

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Paul's *reductio ad absurdum* echoes Greco-Roman rhetoric's use of exaggeration to expose faulty reasoning. His hearers, familiar with body-politic analogies, would immediately grasp the lunacy of a single-organ society.

## Related Passages

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**Hebrews 11:1** — Definition of faith

**Romans 1:17** — The righteous shall live by faith

**1 Corinthians 13:4** — Characteristics of love

**John 15:13** — Greatest form of love

## Study Questions

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1. What happens in churches where one gift-type dominates (all teaching, all evangelism, all worship)?
2. How can you help your church celebrate gift-diversity rather than pursuing gift-uniformity?
3. What 'senses' (gift-types) might be missing or underutilized in your church body?

## Interlinear Text

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|       |           |       |       |             |       |       |              |       |
|-------|-----------|-------|-------|-------------|-------|-------|--------------|-------|
| εἰ    | ὅλον      | τὸ    | σῶμα  | όφθαλμός    | ποῦ   | ἢ     | άκοή         | εἰ    |
| If    | the whole | G3588 | body  | were an eye | where | G3588 | were hearing | If    |
| G1487 | G3650     |       | G4983 | G3788       | G4226 |       | G189         | G1487 |

|           |              |       |       |                   |
|-----------|--------------|-------|-------|-------------------|
| ὅλον      | άκοή         | ποῦ   | ἢ     | օσφρησις          |
| the whole | were hearing | where | G3588 | were the smelling |
| G3650     | G189         | G4226 |       | G3750             |

## Additional Cross-References

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**1 Corinthians 12:21** (Parallel theme): And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.