

1 Corinthians 12:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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—Now Paul addresses gift-pride, the flip side of gift-envy. Having shown the foot/ear cannot say "I don't belong" (vv.15-16), he now shows the eye/head cannot say "I don't need you." *Ou dynastai* ("cannot") is stronger than "should not"—it's impossible, not merely inadvisable. The eye's superior position doesn't grant autonomy; it requires the hand's service.

The head (most prominent, directive) **cannot** dismiss the feet (lowly, distant) as unnecessary. This targets the Corinthians' elitist spirituality—those with prominent gifts (prophecy, teaching, tongues) despising those with humble gifts (helps, administration, mercy). Paul declares such pride irrational: the eye genuinely needs the hand; the head genuinely needs the feet. No member is self-sufficient; all are mutually interdependent. The body functions through coordinated cooperation, not autonomous individuals.

Historical Context

Corinthian social stratification led wealthy, educated, prominent Christians to marginalize poor, uneducated, servant-class believers. Paul insists spiritual gifts transcend social status—a slave with mercy-gifts is as necessary as a wealthy patron with teaching gifts.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. Which believers or gifts might your church's leadership be subtly saying 'I have no need of you' to?
2. How does recognizing your dependence on 'lesser' gifts combat spiritual pride?
3. What structures or attitudes communicate that some gifts are necessary and others optional?

Interlinear Text

οὐκ	δύναται	δὲ	ὀφθαλμὸς	εἰπεῖν	τῇ	χειρί	Χρείαν	
cannot	G1410	And	the eye	say	G3588	unto the hand	need	
G3756		G1161	G3788	G2036		G5495	G5532	
σου	οὐκ	ἔχω·	ἢ	πάλιν	ἡ	κεφαλὴ	τοῖς	ποσίν
of thee	cannot	I have	nor	again	G3588	the head	G3588	to the feet
G4675	G3756	G2192	G2228	G3825		G2776		G4228
Χρείαν	ὑμῶν	οὐκ	ἔχω·					
need	of you	cannot	I have					
G5532	G5216	G3756	G2192					