

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." Οὐ δυνασται ("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 ὁφθαλμὸς εἰπεῖν τῇ χειρὶ Χρείαν
cannot G1410 And the eye say G3588 unto the hand need
G3756 G1161 G3788 G2036 G5495 G5532

σου οὐκ ἔχω· ἂν 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