

# 1 Corinthians 9:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?

## Analysis

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**Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?** Paul names his missionary partner Barnabas (Acts 13-14), noting that both of them uniquely continued to work manual labor rather than living exclusively from gospel ministry. The Greek *mē ergazesthai* (μὴ ἐργάζεσθαι, "to not work") means ceasing secular employment to devote full time to preaching. Other apostles exercised this right; Paul and Barnabas did not.

The rhetorical question expects the answer "Yes, we have that right"—yet Paul and Barnabas voluntarily surrendered it. Why? Paul will explain (v. 12, 18): to remove any obstacle to the gospel, to avoid being a financial burden, and to model self-sacrificial ministry. This is the chapter's hinge: Paul asserts his rights (v. 4-14) only to renounce them (v. 15-18), demonstrating that Christian freedom is most gloriously displayed when willingly limited for love of others.

## Historical Context

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Barnabas, Paul's early missionary companion, was a Levite from Cyprus (Acts 4:36) who sold property to support the Jerusalem church. He partnered with Paul on the first missionary journey (Acts 13-14) and shared Paul's conviction that gospel ministry should not financially burden new converts. Their tent-making (Acts 18:3) was countercultural in a society where teachers expected patronage, but it protected the gospel from accusations of greed.

## Related Passages

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

**1 John 4:8** — God is love

**Revelation 20:12** — Judgment according to deeds

**Matthew 25:31** — Final judgment

## Study Questions

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1. Why do Paul and Barnabas stand out among apostles for continuing manual labor?
2. How does self-support in ministry both honor the gospel and protect it from suspicion?
3. When is it appropriate for ministers to work secularly, and when should churches provide full support?

## Interlinear Text

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ἢ	μόνος	ἐγὼ	καὶ	Βαρναβᾶς	οὐκ	ἔχομεν	ἐξουσίαν	τοῦ	
Or	only	I	and	Barnabas	not	have	power		G3588

G2228 G3441 G1473 G2532 G921

G3756 G2192

G1849

μὴ      ἐργάζεσθαι

to forbear      working

G3361 G2038

## Additional Cross-References

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**Acts 18:3** (Parallel theme): And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.

**Acts 4:36** (Parallel theme): And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

**1 Thessalonians 2:9** (Parallel theme): For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

**Acts 11:22** (Parallel theme): Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

**Acts 14:12** (Parallel theme): And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

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