

Fact Sheet for **“Thinking Ahead to Provide for Mom”**
1 Timothy 5:1-16

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Paul had already given Timothy instructions as to how he ought to conduct his own life and ministry. Now he gave instruction on how to relate to various groups within the church. Paul begins with a little advice concerning various age groups within the church. That advice was for Timothy to relate to them as he would relate to members of his own family.

^{5:1} ¶ Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

This next section is about caring for widows. What is our responsibility before God in caring for our aging parents? What is the church's responsibility? *Notice that the principle presented here could be extended to widowers also.* In Paul and Timothy's day there was very little in the way of governmental resources to help the aging members of society. Their families provided most of the help. The church also provided some help (Acts 6:1-6). What should you do with aging parents in need of help? What should you're your children do with you when you get to that point? *And notice that even in biblical times wives were much more likely to outlive their husbands.* Throughout the OT and NT widows, along with aliens and orphans, were viewed as special objects of God's mercy (Deuteronomy 10:18; 14:29; 24:17-21; James 1:27). Paul wrote this letter to Timothy about 30 years later than that ministry to widows in Acts 6. There needed to be a few more guidelines.

³ ¶ Honor widows who are truly widows. ⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God.

There are widows today who have the ability to care for themselves, but there are those who do not have that ability. In God's design for the family the first responsibility for caring for widows who do not have the ability to care for themselves falls on the immediate family (not the church and not the state). Any plan may involve the social services that the state can provide, but the primary responsibility before God to help parents who are widows rests with their immediate family.

⁵ She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, ⁶ but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives.

In Paul's day widows with no family and no resources had nowhere to look for help but to God and His people. But there were widows who were *not* truly in need, who lived a blatantly selfish and self-indulgent and way of life. Paul used the word "dead" to figuratively speak of their relational separation from God.

⁷ Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach.

Remember that being above reproach was one of the qualifications for an overseer (3:2). Family members who do not care for their mothers and grandmothers who are truly widows would not be above reproach. In addition, if the wrong women were included on the list of widows, then their selfish and self-indulgent lifestyle would bring reproach on the entire group.

⁸ But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

The word “provide” means “to think ahead, to provide by seeing needs in advance”. And the word “relatives” is not actually in the original. The New American Standard a more literal translation. “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” Remember that Paul was writing to Timothy about caring for aging mothers and grandmothers, not about 2nd cousins and other extended family members that the word “relatives” may suggest. Paul then gave three qualifications to put a woman on the list of widows in need of support.

⁹ ¶ Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, ¹⁰ and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work.

What this roll was exactly is not known. But it likely was merely a list of widows who were to receive assistance from the congregation. They were to... 1st – Be not less than 60 years old, 2nd – Be literally a “one man woman” (Compare the qualification for overseers and deacons (3:2, 12), 3rd – Have a good reputation. Younger widows were to be left off this list.

¹¹ But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry ¹² and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. ¹³ Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.

What did Paul mean when he said they had “abandoned their former faith”? The original word is the normal word for “faith” but Paul had in mind one of the extended meanings of the word, “pledge”. This is reflected in the New American Standard translation. It would seem that when these women joined the list of widows they promised to be devoted *only* to Christ, without thought of remarriage. This reminds me of some OT verses (Numbers 30:2; Deuteronomy 23:21; Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). It seems that the desire of younger widows to marry would often move them to rethink their pledge to be devoted *only* to Christ.

¹⁴ So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. ¹⁵ For some have already strayed after Satan.

Encouraging younger widows to marry was not the second best option for them. It was the first best option. In contrast, making a vow to God, then breaking it, was not a good option.

¹⁶ If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

Again, the word “relatives” is not in the original. Paul was not speaking about extended relatives. gain is a more literal translation.

We live in a society where there are many social safety nets for widows... social security, assisted living centers, etc. Appropriately thinking ahead to provide for our aging parents may take many forms. My point is that it is our responsibility before God to think ahead to provide for our aging parents when the time comes when they need our help. This is good and pleasing in the sight of God. Available social services have largely taken the place of the need for the church to provide for widows, but keep your ear to the rail. The time may come when the church may be called on in this capacity again.