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*Doctrines of Demons or Doctrines of Scripture?*

*The Essential Safeguard of a Dispensational Framework for 1 Timothy 4:1–5*

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### **Introduction**

First Timothy 4 evinces a sharp contrast between doctrines of demons and doctrines of Scripture.<sup>1</sup> Paul states explicitly that doctrines of demons will be especially manifest in “later times” (4:1). Such a period of history is different than the *eschaton* or “last days” just prior to the Lord’s return, which is characterized by rampant moral wickedness (2 Tim 3:1–9). Paul’s “latter times” in 4:1 is marked, not by moral declension, but by a departure from the Faith by means of following false doctrine. Since prophetic Scriptures concerning the Day of the Lord and Tribulation period exhibits global political and cosmic signs following the Rapture, signs of doctrinal declension that Paul describes in his first epistle to Timothy must refer to the current era enveloping the Christian Church. A noted characteristic of this dispensation is demonically inspired doctrine—specifically, false teaching that tempts believers to return to marriage and dietary laws that regulated previous dispensations.

By way of historical, exegetical, and theological analyses of 1 Timothy 4:1–5, this paper will demonstrate that divine commands, when not interpreted according to a dispensational framework, may in fact be doctrines of demons. As believers are no longer regulated by the Mosaic code, but rather grace Christians are free from laws that false teachers use to bind their consciences to an economy never intended for them. These demonic doctrines specifically include prohibitions on marriage and food that regulated national Israel under an economy of law. Thus, hermeneutics weighs in the balance and the relevance of dispensationalism becomes paramount in keeping believers from following doctrines of demons instead of following genuine doctrines of Scripture.

### **A Safeguard Proposed**

Virtually all English translations are correct to set-off the pericope in 1 Timothy 4:1–5 as a new major unit in the epistle. The Tyndale House Greek NT, which uses manuscripts only up through the fifth century, marks it off distinctly following the ancient scribal habit of ekthesis, a sort-of precursor to the modern indentation. Both the UBS and Nestle-Aland Greek texts also set it apart, and list no major variants within the text. Though, as both Johnson and Towner point out, it should not be lost that the entire letter to Timothy is oriented around a common theme. It addresses the false teaching currently

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<sup>1</sup> The contrast between demonic teaching and biblical teaching in 1 Tim 4 is evident at vv. 1, 3, 7; with vv. 1, 6, 11, 13, 16.

happening at Ephesus, with instructions to Timothy on how to confront it.<sup>2</sup> Fee also cautions those who would place too sharp of a break between chs 2–3 and ch 4, as he views all the heterodox teaching centered on suspect elders within the Ephesian church who were vying for people’s allegiance.<sup>3</sup> Still, the passage is special for a few reasons.

First Timothy 4:1–5 being set apart emphasizes a past prophecy that was currently taking place in the Ephesian church. “Now the Spirit expressly says,” wrote Paul, “that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (v. 1). This demonic doctrine would be delivered by “lying, insincere teachers with seared consciences” (v. 2), who “*forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods* that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth” (v. 3, emphasis added). Paul specifies in no uncertain terms that two particular doctrines were inspired by demons and taught by men—forbidding marriage and abstaining from foods. As will be demonstrated later, these two dogmas distorted former laws that were originally good, and even qualified, but no longer binding on God’s people (1:8; cf. Rom 7:7–12).<sup>4</sup> Christians are allowed to enjoy both things through prayer, thanksgiving, and by way of a correct knowledge of Scripture (1 Tim 4:4–5). Consequently, as this paper argues, if Christians do not properly interpret these commands meant for a previous generation, they risk obeying demons rather than Scripture. A dispensational framework is what safeguards a proper reading.

### Conflicting Spiritual Doctrines in Latter Times

Paul was addressing a problem that, though expected for a still-future period, was currently infecting the Ephesian Christians. The phrase “latter times” (ὕστεροις καιροῖς) is not a superlative expression but is in the comparative form. As Hulitt Gloer notes, “Since ‘times’ translates *kairos* (a significant time, an opportune time) and not *chronos* (chronological, ‘clock time’), Paul is not concerned with the calendar here, but with a certain season in which these things happen.”<sup>5</sup> This means Paul’s “latter times” in 1 Timothy 4 is not specifying or restrictive to the “last days” (ἔσχαταις ἡμέραις), as in the tribulation period leading to the return of Christ.<sup>6</sup> Yet in 1 Timothy 4:1, the apostle is simply saying “in

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<sup>2</sup> See I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (New York: T&T Clark, 1999), 530; Phillip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 286.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon B. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, UBCS (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 97.

<sup>4</sup> Specific Old Testament laws regulating marriage and food prohibitions are discussed at length in a section below.

<sup>5</sup> W. Hulitt Gloer, *1 & 2 Timothy–Titus*, SHB (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2010), 167.

<sup>6</sup> The phrase “latter times” should not be equated with the superlative term ἔσχατος denoting the *eschaton* or “very last” days. This level of comparison was a diminishing feature in Koine Greek and stands out as an exception in the GNT along with its opposite, πρῶτος or “very first” (cf. Rev 22:13). Paul uses ἔσχατος in 2 Tim 3:1 when describing the rampant immorality on the earth just before the return of Christ. There, doctrinal matters are not specified as in 1 Tim 4, but unrestrained wickedness that will characterize those very last days. A future time, *preceding* the end of all things, characterized by true doctrine being distorted and abandoned is expected in the literature of Second Temple Judaism. First Enoch speaks of later times in the “seventh week” of the world marked by rampant doctrinal apostasy (93:9), while Jubilees condemns a future generation for forsaking God’s covenant and various laws (Jubilees 23:28–33). The very “last days” of the *eschaton* was then expected to follow with the arrival of Messiah (on this last point see, Hermann L. Strack, and Paul Billerbeck, *Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash: Volume 3, Romans through Revelation* (Bellingham: Lexham Academic, 2020), 1693. Ultimately, a biblical-theological approach will understand each appearance of “last days” language according to

future times” which comes before the very last days or *eschaton*.<sup>7</sup> Though such “times, seasons” can describe the days just prior the Lord’s return in Pauline thought (e.g., 1 Cor 4:5), in this case, the season or period is marked by following specific doctrines of demons *before* those last days.<sup>8</sup>

It is also noteworthy that he begins the passage by attributing his revelation to the Holy Spirit. This immediately contrasts what he declares with the two false doctrines inspired by demonic spirits. Some view the phrase “the Spirit [expressly] says” in v. 1 functioning as a NT equivalent to the Old Testament’s (OT) introductory formula, “Thus says the Lord.”<sup>9</sup> Others see it as a “now forgotten” prophecy from non-canonical works like Enoch or Sibylline Oracles.<sup>10</sup> Belville is more likely correct by viewing it as reminiscent of Paul’s earlier prediction in Acts 20 of wolves in sheep’s clothing to arise within the Ephesian church—the same church Timothy now oversaw (vv. 28–31; cf. v. 17).<sup>11</sup> As Paul did in Acts 20, he initiates the passage in 1 Timothy 4 with a prophetic revelation that he probably personally received from God. Importantly, the word “Spirit” here is singular and articular (τὸ . . . πνεῦμα), which identifies the ultimate source of the revelation as the Holy Spirit and not a metaphor for something else. This Spirit is one of prophetic truth, and therefore, distinguished from the plural “deceitful spirits” in the elaborating clause. That is to say, Paul’s caution in 1 Timothy 4 (like elsewhere) is an actual doctrine of Scripture rather than doctrines of demons. He is warning Christians not to be duped in yoking themselves to forms of legalism.

### Demonic Misuse of the Mosaic Law

It appears that two men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, were bad enough for Paul to name personally in 1 Timothy 1:20 as causing a stir; but they were not alone. They had a cult following as some in Ephesus were “devoting” (προσέχοντες) themselves to their false teaching (4:1–2).<sup>12</sup> The backdrop to Paul’s second

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its specific author and contextual usage (see, for example, Heb 1:2; 1 Peter 1:20; and 1 John 2:18 which all use the phrase to include the current era without Paul’s distinctions).

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed., Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 498, 1044.

<sup>8</sup> A.T. Robertson defined the phrase “latter times” in 1 Timothy 4:1 as a “relative time from the prediction, now coming true (a present danger).” See his *The Epistles of Paul* WPNT, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1933), s. v. “1 Timothy 4:1,” Logos Bible Software.

<sup>9</sup> Towner, 287. Part of Towner’s argument rests on what he notes as a similarity between Paul’s phrase “The Spirit expressly says” in 1 Tim 4:1 and John’s formula “Hear what the Spirit says” throughout Revelation 2–3, the latter being steeped in OT allusion. Interestingly, George Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 188, views the same similarities as suggesting the Pauline phrase refers to revelation given directly by Jesus, and therefore, the background of Paul’s warning is rooted in Jesus’ prophecies of future apostasy (e.g., Mark 13:22).

<sup>10</sup> J. H. Bernard, *The Pastoral Epistles*, CGTSC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906), 64–65.

<sup>11</sup> Linda Belville, *1 Timothy*, CBC (Carol Streams: Tyndale, 2009), 81, views Paul as either having received a personal prophetic revelation or one through another prophet or apostle.

<sup>12</sup> The ESV and NRSV are correct to translate the present active participle προσέχοντες in 4:1 instrumentally as a participle of means. The NASB, LSB, NKJV, and CSB also translate the participle correctly, but vaguely; they do so without specifying its instrumental function, “[by] means of.” The NIV is incorrect to translate it circumstantially by adding the conjunction “and” as well as turning the adverbial participle “devoting” into the finite verb “follow.” This is an odd translation

letter to Timothy is also steeped in confronting false teaching that was currently underway in what he earlier termed “latter times” in 1 Tim 4:1.<sup>13</sup> There, he continued naming the cache of culprits which included the same Hymenaeus from his first epistle (along with Alexander), and now Philetus who joined the ranks in teaching false doctrine (2 Tim 2:16–18).

These men were mishandling the OT. They desired to be “law-teachers” (νομοδιδάσκαλοι), which could only mean teachers of *Old Testament* or *Mosaic* law (see 1 Tim 1:7–8).<sup>14</sup> They were arrogantly making claims about Jewish law, but as Paul points out, they were totally ignorant of the law (1:7). By this is probably meant they cared little for context but craved the power of coercion a legalistic framework can provide. As Thornton notes, “The problem was not with the opponents’ view of the law, but with their handling of it.”<sup>15</sup> They distorted parts of the Old Testament ranging from elaborate myths and useless minutia over finer points (1:4, 6–7) to more current affairs by arguing that the resurrection, probably from Daniel 12, already took place (2 Tim 2:18). Thus, references to “law” within 1 Timothy should be understood concretely as reference to Israel’s law, not as mere principles, or laws outside the Hebrew Scriptures.<sup>16</sup> In the passage at hand, false teachers were constraining Christians to Mosaic laws regarding marriage and dietary restrictions. Used by demons, these men were promulgating destructive teaching that was spreading among the Ephesian church and poisoning its members. They did so by misappropriating parts of the OT never intended for the Christian church.

### **The Law is Not for the “Righteous,” i.e., the “Christian”**

Early in 1 Timothy Paul makes a critical distinction about the law that has direct bearing on the two prohibitions in 4:3. He says in 1:9 that the law is *not* meant for the “righteous / just” (δίκαιος). It is well known that the overwhelming message of Paul in the NT is that the believer in this economy is made righteous only through faith in Christ. This is acknowledged by all evangelical traditions. The

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since it violates almost all the common patterns accompanying a participle of attendant circumstance. The instrumental function makes the most sense given the following string of plural datives, “deceitful,” “spirits,” and “teaching” and Paul’s use of it elsewhere in his personal letters. In Titus 1:13–14 he uses this same verbal sequence, the nominative masculine present active plural participle προσέχοντες followed by three plural datives. He does this to express the instrument or *the means by which* Christians are to remain in the faith: “<sup>13</sup>Rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup>by means of them not devoting themselves [μὴ προσέχοντες] to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth [emphasis added].” The only real difference between the two is that the former (1 Tim 4) is expressed positively and the latter negatively. In other words, in 1 Tim 4, some will apostatize *by means of* following aberrant teaching. In Titus 1, others will remain faithful *by means of not* following aberrant teaching. In both places, the lure away from the Faith is doctrinal.

<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, the same verb is used in 4:1 and v. 13 to express “devotion” (προσέχω) to doctrine. The former concerns devotion to false teaching of demons while the latter concerns devotion to the teaching of Scripture. People are devoted to one or the other. The contrast could not be sharper.

<sup>14</sup> The same word elsewhere appears only in Luke 5:17 and Acts 5:34 and is used in conjunction with the Pharisees in both places. The latter reference directly identifies the esteemed rabbi Gamaliel as a “law-teacher” (νομοδιδάσκαλος). Clearly, it is the *Mosaic law* that is view whenever the NT uses this rare compound.

<sup>15</sup> Dillon T. Thornton, “Sin Seizing an Opportunity through the Commandments: The Law in 1 Tim 1:8–11 and Rom 6–8,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 36 (2014): 147. Thornton’s article is an excellent study demonstrating the errors of false teachers’ misappropriating the Mosaic law for Christians. The law was always innately “good” as created by God, but only when used according to its intended purpose (142–158).

<sup>16</sup> See Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 217.

righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel of Christ and the righteous man is the one who lives by faith in its message (Rom 1:16; 3:21–22). Paul is emphatic elsewhere that no one is made righteous or is justified by the law, but only by faith in Christ (Gal 2:16; 3:11; Rom 3:21; 5:1). Indeed, the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith—sourced in Paul—is among the most sacred and yet divisive teachings, as it frees and breaks away liberated Christians from the legalistic practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Thus, whatever law was given to Israel—marriage, and dietary prohibitions, for example—*cannot, by necessity, govern the Christian according to Pauline thought.*

While Paul’s usage of *δικαιος* in his letters to Timothy do convey a clear ethical or moral sense (e.g., 1 Tim 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22), surely his context in 1 Timothy 1:9 is not divorced from its forensic sense as used in Galatians, Romans, and elsewhere. After all, he is writing to *Christians*—those justified by faith in Christ.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, by saying the law is not laid down for the “just / righteous,” Paul is saying the law is not meant for the Christian. This sense of the word is made apparent when he *contrasts* the law’s proper usage with that which is in accordance with “the gospel of the blessed God” in 1 Timothy 1:11, which he, Paul, was entrusted. Thus, a clear law / gospel or law / grace dichotomy becomes evident. It bears repeating what Paul earlier said, that Christians are no longer under law but under grace (Rom 6:14). He also pointed out that the revelation of the current dispensation of grace was given or entrusted to him (Eph 3:2, 8–10; Col 1:25–27).<sup>18</sup> Consequently, any commands of the law alluded to in 1 Timothy are not meant for Christians who are declared righteous by faith alone. The laws echoed in 4:3 were intended—with qualifications—to regulate the practices of Jewish believers under the economy of Moses. The church, by contrast, resides within the economy of grace.

Apparently, demons want to unjustly bind those enjoying freedom in Christ in this dispensation to a yoke of slavery already fulfilled in Christ. As even Satan demonstrated when tempting Jesus, the evil in such a tactic is not in the doctrine *per se*, but by *misappropriating the doctrine* and leveling it over those outside its purview (Matt 4:6; cf. Psalm 91). That is what makes the teachings warned about in 1 Timothy 4:3 “doctrines of demons,” the rending of original or intended context. Paul never castigates or devalues the law of Moses, but praises it as “holy, and just, and good” (Rom 7:12). The law was a necessary charter

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<sup>17</sup> See, Thornton, 148.

<sup>18</sup> Recently, Mark A. Snoeberger, “Refining Dispensational Discourse: Reconsidering Four Common Expressions,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 27 (2022): 15–30 [esp. 25–29], made a noteworthy case against viewing Paul’s contrast of law and grace in Romans 6:14 as contrasting two distinct *dispensations*, instead choosing to view it as teaching a change of nature in the converted man. He also argues that Paul’s “dispensation of grace” phrase in Ephesians 3:2 is really describing the mystery of the *Church* as a homogenous people of God without giving a specific nomenclature for the current economy. For Snoeberger, the current dispensation should be labeled “the Church” rather than “Grace.” Snoeberger marshals salient points for both, and rightly points out the confusion that can result from the terminology “disp. of law” vs. “disp. of grace” as suggestive of an absence of grace during the Mosaic period. However, I would push back on his case against Eph 3:2 as not providing us a good label for the current economy. For one, the words Paul use there are very clear—*τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ* (lit.: “the dispensation of the grace of God”)—giving us an actual textual nomenclature for the current era. This makes the label Dispensation of Grace an actual *biblical-theological* term, supporting the idea that dispensationalism is a genuine *biblical theology* rather than merely confessional, systematic, or a philosophical theology. Second, he overlooks an important distinction between the Christian church and God’s government of grace. I would argue that the Church is the *visible manifestation* of the current dispensation of grace, not the dispensation itself. The ruling factor of God’s government in this economy is *grace*, which the Church represents and even helps administrate (much like Moses and Israel were the administrators of the law and not the law itself; though, for rhetorical purposes, they are synonymous at times, e.g., Luke 16:29, 31; 24:27). These are clearly related concepts, yet still distinct. That said, I do find Snoeberger’s argument for renaming the current economy as “the Church” (instead of “Grace”) due to the Church’s *newness* in God’s governing rule in history to be compelling.

to transform a wandering people into an actual nation, and therefore, entirely sufficient for its purposes. But as the apostle made so clear to the church at Rome, “For you are no longer under law, but under grace” (Rom 6:14). For Paul, Jewish law is not “good” when placing Christians under it or binding them to it in any fashion as was happening in Ephesus. Rather, its goodness is measured by meeting its every demand in the death of Christ and by freeing believers from its bondage (see Gal 5:1 and Eph 2:15). God’s people were now free to eat whatever food they want, and they were free to marry anyone outside their ethnicity, nationality, or tribe. To teach anything different was to teach a demonic doctrine as it robbed them of the grace of Christ.

### Colossian Philosophers and Ephesian Demons

While it is possible that the demonic doctrine in 1 Timothy 4 was connected to the false teaching condemned in Colossians 2:8–23 (and not OT law), the differences between them outnumber their similarities. In what scholars call the “Colossian heresy,” a syncretistic blend of “philosophy and empty deceit” combined with “self-made religion” attempted to compete with Christ for supremacy. Though part of that teaching was no doubt influenced by certain Jewish practices like setting aside festivals, the sabbath day, and a new moon or beginning of the month (Col 2:8), other than passing judgments in questions of food and drink, nothing resembles the doctrines of demons in 1 Timothy 4:3. In the latter, no mention is made of “worship of angels,” “visions,” and extreme ascetism as they are in the Colossian letter (Col 2:18, 23). Conversely, in Colossians no mention is made of the two doctrines Paul attributes to demons in his letter to Timothy—forced celibacy and abstinence from foods (1 Tim 4:3).<sup>19</sup>

It is also worth noting not only the differences in false teaching infecting Colossae and Ephesus, but also the differences in location and legacy between the two. Colossae, though rich in history, was a modest town and nowhere mentioned in the missions of Paul. Ephesus was the “jewel” of the ancient Mediterranean and consistent hub for Paul and his companions.<sup>20</sup> Colossae was approximately 120 miles east of Ephesus. Though a common road connected them, it took around a week for the average person to walk it.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, a massive earthquake hit the city of Colossae in AD 60 causing what has been dubbed a “terminal destruction,” which included not only its infrastructure but also the deaths of many of its citizens.<sup>22</sup> Parts of the city would eventually be rebuilt, but it would never retain its earlier prominence.

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<sup>19</sup> While Colossians 2:21 does list “do not taste” as one of the false teachings, which may suggest a similar prohibition of foods as in 1 Timothy 4:3, it is too vague to claim a direct parallel between the two.

<sup>20</sup> The contrast between Ephesus and Colossae is stark. In the NT, the word-group for “Ephesus” appears a total of twenty-one times through Acts, Paul’s letters, and Revelation. A major port-city and fortified by a wall of six-miles in circumference, Ephesus was undoubtedly the most important city in the Roman province of Asia in the first century, famous for its massive amphitheaters, libraries, and temple to Artemis/Diana (one of seven ancient “world wonders”). Eventually it became home to three separate temples, earning the name “temple-warden of the emperors.” By contrast, the city of Colossae is referenced only one time in the NT, in the opening to letter to the Colossians (Col 1:1). The center of the town was situated on a two-hundred foot biconical mound and consisted of only approximately 23 acres. For more, see Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christian in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius*, ch 1; and Clinton. E. Arnold, *The Colossian Syncretism: The Interface between Christianity and Folk Belief at Colossae* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995).

<sup>21</sup> Alan H. Cadwallader, “The Social and Geographical World of Colossae (Col 1:2; 1:15–20; 2:6–3:17; 3:18–4:1),” in *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*, eds. Barry J. Beitzel, Jessica Parks, and Doug Mangum (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2019), 570–571.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 572.

The nearby town Laodicea would rebuild to its former glory after the same catastrophe and even leave a big enough imprint to be plotted on a third-century map of Roman roads. Both Colossae and Hierapolis, however, would be completely abandoned and forgotten. Therefore, there is good reason to believe the aberrant doctrines promulgated by Colossian false teachers did not make its way to Ephesus by the time Paul wrote to Timothy.<sup>23</sup> The Ephesian church was plagued by another set of false teachings, dogma Paul directly attributed to demonic beings who acted through human liars (1 Tim 4:1–2).

### More Than Rhetoric

In 1 Timothy 4, Paul attributes two doctrines to demonic abuse as taught by disqualified men, “forbidding of marriage and abstinence from foods” (v. 3). This is language much stronger than simply “philosophy” or “human tradition” as in Colossians 2. Luke Timothy Johnson notes that accusations of demonic influence were common in “the polemical rhetoric within first-century Judaism.”<sup>24</sup> But this was not mere rhetoric for the apostle.<sup>25</sup> His attribution of *demons* for the teaching lacks a metaphorical or figurative sense. There is no reason to question that he really did believe such doctrine was demonic.<sup>26</sup>

Paul very rarely claimed that demons were the source behind deviant falsehood in Christian churches. On only one other occasion does Paul draw a connection between heretical practices and demonic influence.<sup>27</sup> To the Corinthian church, he stated that what pagans sacrifice they “sacrifice to demons,” and warns the Corinthian believers not to “participate with demons” (1 Cor 10:20). As even Johnson acknowledges, Paul’s overall perception of the threat from evil spiritual forces in 1 Timothy seemed to extend past colorful oratory.<sup>28</sup> “The origin of such teaching,” observed Zehr, “is none other than Satan himself. As hypocritical liars, these teachers, who wore a false face, made an outward show but inwardly were deceitful.”<sup>29</sup> When the apostle later claims that “some have already strayed after Satan” in

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<sup>23</sup> One cannot be too dogmatic on this point. Dates on the Colossae earthquake, for instance, have been challenged, and there is simply no way to gauge definitively the impact that the incipient-Gnosticism in Colossae had on the Ephesian Christians. The point made is simply that there are more differences than similarities between the two locales, which tangentially supports my claim that the false-teachers in 1 Tim 4 were specifically mishandling the OT rather than teaching the Colossian heresy influenced more by sources outside the canonical Hebrew Scriptures.

<sup>24</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AYB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 239–245.

<sup>25</sup> Though rare, instances do appear in the literature of Second Temple Judaism of demons who lead people astray, but no specific doctrine is identified as an avenue to do it. See IQS 3.22 and *Testament of Rueben* 2.1.

<sup>26</sup> See D. J. Downs, “Early Catholicism and Apocalypticism in the Pastoral Epistles,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 67 (2005): 657–58.

<sup>27</sup> Meaning, for the church *currently*. Second Thessalonians 2:9–12 speaks of a time when a leader will deceive people into believing lies over truth by the “energy of Satan.” Contextually, this is a period reserved for the future after the church is removed (see vv. 6, 7). It is not during the same (or current) age as that of the doctrines of demons described in 1 Tim 4.

<sup>28</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, 244.

<sup>29</sup> Paul M. Zehr, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, BCBC (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2010), 97.

5:15, Paul is pointing back to these same doctrines of demons that were presently luring Ephesian Christians away from the truth of grace.<sup>30</sup>

Such a view is at odds with those who posit an eschatology where Satan, and by extension demons, is/are currently bound. One recent advocate is Joshua Howard who claims that Jesus's death and resurrection "exorcised" Satan from this world.<sup>31</sup> A primary result of *Christus victor*, Howard argues, is Satan's defeat and current "inability to deceive the church."<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the promised eschatological kingdom has been launched and the church currently resides within that kingdom age free of Satan's deceptive power (see Rev 20:2). However, a tension emerges as even Howard admits that Satan's restraint does not mean that he has *no* power to deceive Christians in this age. In fact, "Deception is a quality of Satan whereby he seduces people into believing a destructive lie (Gen 3), a quality that is also exercised in the New Testament by demonic spirits (1 Tim 4:1–2, 1 John 4:1)."<sup>33</sup> An irony presents itself in that Howard appeals to the very passage being examined here in 1 Timothy 4 to support the obvious NT truth that Satan and his cohort do, in fact, deceive believers. The tension becomes most apparent when Howard acknowledges, "Satan not only brings persecution in this age, but he also works through deceptive means to accomplish his goals."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, satanic deception was precisely the ongoing problem at Ephesus and why the apostle identified it as "doctrines of demons" in 1 Timothy 4:1. Exactly how Satan is unable to deceive believers and yet still succeeds in deceiving believers is a tension never truly resolved.<sup>35</sup> However, the tension is removed when recognizing Satan is in fact *not* bound, and currently persists in inspiring teachers to bind Christians to rules that violate their freedom in Christ, as Paul warned his protégé in 1 Timothy 4:1–5.

### Interpretive History of 1 Timothy 4:1–5

If the problem at Ephesus was a demonic abuse of commands, it raises a few questions: why did demons choose marriage and food restrictions specifically as the two doctrines to shackle Christians? Were these Jewish laws or local pagan practices? The history of interpretation of this passage is interesting. The earliest commentators combined accuracy, and, I believe, error.

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<sup>30</sup> D. R. Brown, *The God of This Age: Satan in the Churches and Letters of the Apostle Paul*, WUNT 2/409 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2015), argues that the references to Satan in 1 and 2 Timothy are intended to create a link between false teaching and Satan himself. Believers are cautioned against subscribing to any doctrine that attempts to separate them from the truth of the gospel and the church.

<sup>31</sup> Joshua P. Howard, *The Exorcism of Satan: The Binding of the Strong Man by Christ the King* (Conway: Free Grace Press, 2022).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 14. Emphasis mine.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 184. See also 190 compared with 161, 167.

<sup>35</sup> Howard does offer an interesting and nuanced "already / not yet" paradigm as a way to explain demonic power as currently restrained. However, this interpretive model does not account for all of the satanic references in Scripture—for example, 1 Tim 4 does not appear in Howard's "Satanic Passage Analysis" (215–222)—and thus, the tension persists.



## Ancient and Modern Christian Readings

Most Church Fathers viewed the aberrant doctrines in 1 Timothy 4:3 to be those taught by Gnostics prevalent at the time, and as such, largely believed they were living in the last days. These include Tertullian (d. 220), Basil (d. 379), Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386), Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394), John Chrysostom (d. 407), Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428), Augustine (d. 430), and Theodoret of Cyr (d. 466).<sup>36</sup> Chrysostom believed these false teachers were the “Manichees [sic], the Encratites, and the Marcionites, and the whole of their tribe.”<sup>37</sup> In his tract *Contra Faustum*, Augustine went so far to claim complete fulfillment of the heresies in 1 Timothy 4:3 in the Manichaeans of his day. For him, this was “as clear as day.”<sup>38</sup> The earliest of them, Tertullian, gets closest to this paper’s argument of the dangers of neglecting a dispensational reading of the passage. Though he wrongly attributed the origin of the false teaching in 1 Timothy 4 with local pagan philosophers (and not OT law), he nevertheless provides insightful commentary in the seventh chapter of his *On Prescription Against Heretics*. There, he critiques Gnostics and Platonists as being “rash interpreters” of the times by confusing the “dispensation[s] of God.”<sup>39</sup> While Tertullian and each of these early voices incorrectly believed they were witnessing the fulfillment 1 Timothy 4:1–5 in their day through Gnosticism, they were nevertheless correct to view this “departing from the faith” by way of demonic doctrine as a *present* reality, not merely eschatological. And for Tertullian in particular, he correctly assessed the dangers of mixing different dispensations and the heresy that can result from such an approach.

Their accuracy notwithstanding, the early interpreters were shortsighted in their readings of the two doctrines of demons in 1 Timothy 4:3. They tended to view them exclusively through a contemporary cultural lens and not take into account their OT origins. They also failed to recognize a subtle, yet critical, distinction within those Jewish laws. The Hebrew Scriptures forbade only *certain* marriages and *certain* foods at *certain* times as governed by Mosaic Law. Neglecting these distinctions was an error of Clement of Alexandria when he pointed out the forced piety of those who held a disdain for marriage. He viewed Paul’s warning as a condemnation against *wholesale* celibacy, that is, it is “not particularly praiseworthy unless it arises through love of God.”<sup>40</sup> Likewise, in his tract *On Monogamy*, Tertullian calls heretics to task for forbidding both marriage and foods in their *entirety*. He concluded, “It is one thing to regulate but another thing to do away with altogether.”<sup>41</sup> Because they neglected to see the

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<sup>36</sup> See Peter Gorday, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 180.

<sup>37</sup> John Chrysostom, “Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy,” in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. James Tweed and Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 13:444. Hereafter cited as *NPNE*.

<sup>38</sup> *NPNE*, 1.4:218–219.

<sup>39</sup> Tertullian, “The Prescription against Heretics,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian, The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Peter Holmes, (Buffalo: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 3:246. Hereafter cited at *ANF*.

<sup>40</sup> *ANF*, 2:288.

<sup>41</sup> *ANF*, 4:71.

OT as the origin of these two doctrines, preferring instead to source them in Neo-Platonism, they necessarily overlooked the OT's prohibitions of marriages and foods which were always qualified.

Most, but not all, modern scholars continue the same mistakes as their ancient forbearers. They largely view the demonic doctrines in 1 Timothy 4 as being promulgated by ascetic influencers outside of an OT context (with parallels drawn from the syncretism condemned in Colossians 2). They also virtually assume the doctrines themselves teach an *exclusive* forbidding of marriage or foods. Kelly, for example, places the prohibition against marriage in the context of gnostic and Essene preferences for celibacy. Additionally, the abstinence of foods may suggest a "fusion of Gnostic and Jewish elements."<sup>42</sup> Concerning the prohibitions on food, Lea and Griffin attribute the false teaching mainly to non-Jewish ascetic practices similar to, if not the same as, those inferred from Colossians 2. They believe Paul's central point is that "asceticism should never be treated as a means for salvation (Col 2:20–23)."<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Black and McClung focus on the ascetic aspects of the false teaching and point out that the Colossian heresy is the closest parallel to 1 Timothy 4. For them, the asceticism at both Colossae and Ephesus are due to "early gnostic influences."<sup>44</sup>

### Common Interpretive Mistakes

Apart from a select few, a common approach exists among both ancient and modern interpreters of 1 Timothy 4. They both tend to identify the doctrines of demons in v. 3 by looking to movements *outside* the OT. They see traces of platonic dualism, early gnostic influence, or rampant ascetic behavior plaguing the Ephesian Christians as they did those in Colossae. According to them, this is the source of the demonic doctrine. But a few errors are made in these assertions. The first is they overlook clear references to the Mosaic Law within 1 Timothy itself (see 1 Tim 1:7–10, 18). The immediate context, therefore, demands some influence of Jewish law for the two prohibitions, if not exclusively so. The second is a corollary. Because they do not factor in an OT context for the two bans, they wrongly assume a reading that overlooks their partitive sense. That is, marriages and foods were never forbade in the OT *in toto*, but in parts.

Such is the mistake of Hulitt Gloer, for example, who rightly acknowledges Old Testament laws that prohibit certain foods in Leviticus 11. But, he believes the false teachers of 1 Timothy 4 were *not* dependent on the OT in any way, "which has no prohibition against marriage."<sup>45</sup> This is a surprising claim given the clear marriage restrictions throughout OT law, and the clear nomenclature Paul gives these men in 1 Timothy 1:7 as "teachers of the law" (νομοδιδάσκαλοι). Indeed, the subtlety of distinctions in OT law that calls for *certain* prohibitions at *certain* times is a significant reason for what makes these doctrines so easy for demons to exploit. It is therefore the Old Testament that should first and foremost

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<sup>42</sup> J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, BNTC (A & C Black: London, 1963), 93–97. Kelly does draw interesting parallels with the vegetarianism described Paul in Romans 14.

<sup>43</sup> Thomas D. Lea, and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 127–132.

<sup>44</sup> Robert Black & Ronald McClung, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2004), 90–92.

<sup>45</sup> W. Hulitt Gloer, 168.

shed light on the prohibitions in 1 Timothy 4:3, not aberrant forms of ancient Hellenism which drowns in speculative theory.<sup>46</sup>

### Qualified Old Testament Marriage Laws for National Israel

Examples abound of Old Testament law that forbade marriage in parts. These include Exodus 34:16, which prohibits Israelites against covenanting with surrounding nations, eating their food and “[*Taking*] of their daughters for your sons who whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods [emphasis added].” In Numbers 36, Moses settled a dispute over land and inheritance for a group of women and declared, “This is what the LORD commands concerning the daughters of Zelophehad: ‘Let them marry whom they think best, *only they shall marry within the clan of the tribe of their father*’ (v. 6, emphasis added).<sup>47</sup> Noteworthy instances of marriage prohibitions also appear in Deuteronomy 7 and 25. The former states, that when Yahweh gives the promised land to Israel by driving out all the wicked nations, “*You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons*, for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods” (Deut 7:3–4, emphasis added). The latter adds a prohibiting stipulation concerning the widow of an Israelite: “If brothers dwell together, and one of them dies and has no son, *the wife of the dead man shall not be married outside the family to a stranger*” (Deut 25:5, emphasis added).

In addition to the Pentateuch multiple cases of marriage restrictions swarm the OT. These include stipulations in Joshua, 1 Kings, Ezra, Nehemiah, and others. For example, Joshua 23:12–13 states, “For if you turn back and cling to the remnant of these nations remaining among you *and make marriages with them, so that you associate with them and they with you*, know for certain that the LORD your God will no longer drive out these nations before you” (emphasis added). Moreover, 1 Kings 11:1–2 reports: “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, ‘*You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you*, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods’” (emphasis added). Historical books like Ezra and Nehemiah describe the disaster upon Jews for not obeying divine laws on marriage given to them. Ezra 9 decries, “For *they have taken some of their daughters to be wives for themselves and for their sons*, so that the holy race has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands. And in this faithlessness the hand of the officials and chief men has been foremost” (v. 2, emphasis added). This is followed by Ezra 10 which is all about divine punishment for returned Israelite exiles marrying foreign women. In the final section of Nehemiah, the book closes by recalling King Solomon’s indiscretion and asks: “Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God *by marrying foreign women?*” (Neh. 13:27, emphasis added). As these examples show, Israel was never commanded not to marry *at all*. They were commanded not to marry *certain women* who would pollute the Jewish race and turn men’s hearts away from Yahweh.

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<sup>46</sup> Because Hulitt Gloer looks outside the OT as the original source document of the two doctrines, he is forced to admit the inevitable: “It is difficult to determine the origins and specific nature of these prohibitions against certain foods and marriages” (Ibid). As argued here, when one looks to the OT as the premier source document for the prohibitions in 1 Tim 4:3, the difficulty becomes far less so.

<sup>47</sup> Commenting on this passage, the Talmud (*Bava Basra* 120a) explains this was only in effect for that generation entering the land, so that its origin of the province was entirely Jewish tribal. Cf., Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, eds. *The Chumash*, The Stone Edition (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, 2000), 933, n.6.

## Qualified Old Testament Food Laws for National Israel

Like marriage prohibitions for Israel (which contained caveats), laws against food, also with caveats, permeate the Old Testament. Along with its injunctions on marriage, Exodus 34:15–16 contains one on food as well: “Lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and *you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice*” (v. 16, emphasis added). Deut 14:3–21 (par. Lev 11:1–47) contains the lengthiest passage reminding Israel they are a holy people, chosen out of all of humankind, signified by the way they ate. They were to be set part in their consumption of food and “not eat any abomination” (v. 3), which included different species of animals, even to the shapes of their hoofs and how the animal itself ate (chewing the cud or not). Israel’s food laws drastically marked them off from their pagan neighbors to the point of how *not* to prepare the food and *not* being allowed to eat of any animal that died naturally (v. 21). However, they were permitted to give the prohibited foods “to the sojourner who is within your towns, that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner” (v. 21). But for Israel, Moses wrote, the distinctions of prohibitions were mandatory, “For *you* are a people holy to the LORD your God” [emphasis added].<sup>48</sup>

From these types of food laws in the OT came later rabbinic teachings that continued dietary regulations for the Jewish people but took them further than the Hebrew Bible. In fact, medieval Jewish scholars went so far to directly tie a Jewish person’s diet to their salvation. It is here that “legalism” becomes full bloom. Rabbi Avraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1164), whose commentary on the entire Tanakh was hailed for its grammatical and linguistic analysis and Rabbi Moshe ben Nachman (aka, Ramban, 1194–1270), a leading Torah scholar in Spain, taught that certain foods were destructive to the soul of a Jewish person and can even engender a spiritual insensitivity to those that eat them.<sup>49</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, (aka, Rashi, 1040–1105), considered the commentator *par excellence*, viewed the OT food prohibitions as a direct avenue to holiness. He taught that various foods are forbidden to Jews because their spiritual mission in life is to attach themselves to the “Ultimate Source” of spiritual life. As Rashi saw it, Jews must refrain from eating anything that the “Divine Intelligence” knows will hinder such a lofty goal.<sup>50</sup> With their strong take on food laws from the OT, these medieval rabbis no doubt influenced modern day Rabbinism. Commenting on kashrut law in Leviticus 11, the editors of *The Chumash* state the food laws are what they are so, “By observing these laws, the Jew can pull himself up the ladder of holiness. . . . A Jew’s consumption of non-kosher food deadens his spiritual capacities and denies him the full opportunity to become holy.”<sup>51</sup> The point made here is that, like Jewish marriage laws, Israel’s food laws were never prohibitions *in toto*. Old Testament law governed dietary restrictions in parts—what to eat, how to prepare it, and when to eat it. These laws enforced the idea that Israel was a nation set apart from the rest of the world. Unfortunately, however, even later Jewish teachers exploited these laws and turned them into something outside their intentions in the OT.

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<sup>48</sup> According to *The Chumash*, 1101, summary note for Deut 14: “Forbidden foods. . . are an abomination and must not be eaten by people who should always be conscious of their relationship to God”

<sup>49</sup> See Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz, eds. *The Chumash*, 1011, n. 3–21.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 597, summary note on Lev 11.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

## Two Common Factors

In each of these examples of marriage and dietary prohibitions, two common elements unite them. The first is, they were laws that forbade both marriage and food *in parts*. That is, there was never a wholesale sanction on marriage (which included sex), or a general ban on foods ever given to Israel. Rather, Israelites were regulated by caveats that restricted them to marry only within their tribal allegiances and never with foreign or non-Jewish women. Additionally, they were restricted to eat of only certain animals and in a certain manner (like not boiling a baby goat in its mother's milk, Deut 14:21) or even on certain days or for certain circumstances (like festivals). Never did the law govern dietary abstinence from *all* food or from *all* marriages nor for any other reason than to be set apart as God's holy nation.<sup>52</sup>

The second common bond is that each marriage and food restriction was divinely administered under the Mosaic economy. Whether they are found in the Torah or other parts of the Tanakh, laws regulating Jewish marriage and diet encompassed the time of Moses to the time of Christ or in dispensational terms, the Dispensation of Law. This means the Church was never in the purview of these laws, as the demonic teachers in 1 Timothy 4 tried to sell. While Israel comprised twelve unique ethnic tribes forming one theocratic Jewish nation, the church is a spiritual body comprised of every ethnicity, tribe, and nation. Racial purity through marriage and sexual union was necessary for national Israel to be an ethnically distinct people among the wicked nations on earth. This was not necessary for the Church since she is not bound by borders or tribes, but by *every tongue* that confesses Jesus as Lord (Phil 2:11). When Jesus declared all foods clean in Mark 7, enforced by Peter's experience in Acts 10 of permission to eat every formerly unclean animal, food restrictions were permanently lifted for God's people. Such continued for marriage. At times Paul did emphasize the advantages of singleness and allowed for temporary sexual abstinence (1 Cor 7:5). But, as Köstenberger points out, "He never *forbade* people to marry—which would have been considered odd by most people in the Jewish or Greco-Roman world of his day—or required them to abstain from food."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, to the Corinthians, Paul extolled the freedom Christians have, even freedom to eat food once offered to idols *and* to marry women who are not bound by race but faith in Christ (1 Cor 9:4–5).

In sum, it is the contention of this paper that the demonic doctrines in 1 Timothy 4:3 were being promulgated by teachers influenced, not so much by ascetic or Gnostic (more correctly, proto-gnostic) movements such as those earlier in Colossae, but rather by laws in the Old Testament. This does not mean there was absolutely no incipient-gnostic influence lurking in the thoughts and practices of the false teachers in 1 Timothy 4. It is to say only that the overall context of the epistle places these men within a stream of "teachers of the law" (1:7), and therefore, the text delimits the demonic doctrine in 4:2–3 to a faulty interpretation of the laws of Moses. Using a legalistic framework, these teachers attempted to bind Christians to Mosaic laws intended for national Israel, not the Church. They were enforcing the same OT restrictions with or without their stated caveats onto the Ephesian Christians. Thus, their error was hermeneutical. The OT laws were originally good as long as they were kept according to their intended purposes. In Paul's language, the law was to be "used law lawfully" (1 Tim 1:8). The false teachers in 1 Timothy 4 violated authorial intent in their mishandling of the OT, and as result, created "doctrines of

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<sup>52</sup> Later Talmudic literature such as *Bavra Batra* (60b.11–21) suggests both refraining from eating and entering marriages as signs of mourning proposed by certain ascetic Jewish people to their sages over the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. These prohibitions included not drinking wines eating meat, bread, and certain produce, as well as holding those who "marry and procreate" in contempt since they were unintentional "wrong doers." Cf. Strack, and Billerbeck, 3:1671.

<sup>53</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, EBTC (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2021), 141–142.

demons.” These doctrines were—and are—so dangerous because they violate(d) the doctrine of grace. Believers now reside within a new economy, one regulated by gracious freedom from the entire law (Gal 5:1, 18; Rom 6:14).

### **An Alternative Similar Reading**

Some scholars do offer readings that draw things closer in the direction of this paper. For example, Johnson suggests that the asceticism of first century Jewish groups such as the Therapeutae and the Essenes may have influenced those who forbade marriage and certain foods in 1 Timothy 4 but cautions against this being definitive. He rightly prefers to identify them as the “would-be teachers of the Law” in 1:7, suggesting they may not even be Jews, much less Jews trained in Torah.<sup>54</sup> Towner also brings a few new elements into the conversation. His view of the demonic doctrines in 1 Timothy 4:3 is different from the others as he places them in a *futurist* context and absent of any platonic dualism or gnostic tendencies. For Towner, the background of the marriage and food prohibitions is best placed in an over-realized eschatology that seemed to affect the Ephesian church as it did at Corinth (see 1 Cor 7). He says that “In 1 Corinthians the sense of living in the Eschaton/age of the Spirit was accompanied by an inordinate compulsion to express personal freedom in matters of food, while in 1 Timothy the ‘initiated’ had apparently equated ‘piety’ with food asceticism.”<sup>55</sup> On this reading, the expectation of Christ’s imminent return engendered stricter attitudes toward marriage and food, emphasizing the spiritual over the physical. But, instead of gnostic dualism, Towner suggests their “dualistic conclusions” may have derived from a certain way of interpreting the Old Testament.<sup>56</sup>

It is Towner’s latter point of sourcing the doctrines in 1 Timothy 4:3 in OT law with demons twisting them out of context which finds agreement here. However, according to Towner and others the demonic doctrines were condemned by Paul for incorrectly promulgating an over-realized eschatology.<sup>57</sup> An earlier proponent was William Lane who published a brief article in the mid 1960s arguing for the two demonic doctrines in 1 Timothy 4:3 being a case of indistinguishing the current age with the age of the eschaton.<sup>58</sup> According to Lane, false-teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus in Ephesus were insisting that Christ’s resurrection initiated the consummation of all things and they were therefore were currently residing in the new age (2 Tim 2:17). As they understood Jesus’s discourses on the future age with no marriages (Matt 22:30), and Paul’s earlier dictum that the Kingdom did not consist of eating and drinking (Rom 14:17) they falsely believed “that the conditions of life in that age were now in force.”<sup>59</sup> So, these

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<sup>54</sup> Johnson, 245–247.

<sup>55</sup> Towner, 294–295.

<sup>56</sup> See P. H. Towner, “The Present Age in the Eschatology of the Pastoral Epistles,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 427–48

<sup>57</sup> See Douglass J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 330; Dillon T. Thornton, *Hostility in the House of God: An Investigation of the Opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy*, BBRS 15 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 213–23; and Paul Trebilco, *Early Christians in Ephesus*, 219–22.

<sup>58</sup> William L. Lane, “1 Tim. IV. 1–3. An Early Instance of Over-Realized Eschatology?” *New Testament Studies* 11, no. 2 (Jan 1965): 164–167.

<sup>59</sup> William L. Lane, 166.

teachers were oppressing Christians with “laws” meant for the age to come and were therefore guilty of an “over realized” eschatology.

Lane’s proposal, like Towner’s after him, certainly has merit as Paul does call out two false teachers by name along with their teaching that a general resurrection had already occurred. Still, there is little in the NT that calls such specific attention to the forbidding of marriages and abstaining of foods for the future unlike the OT regulated for the past.<sup>60</sup> As such, I believe the culprits in 1 Timothy 4 were misappropriating OT laws regarding marriage and food in an attempt to fetter Christians to a *previous* dispensation, much like the Judaizers did with circumcision in Galatia. The pseudo-teachers of the law in Ephesus continued the tactic of the Judaizers in Galatia by “spying out” the Ephesian Christians’ freedom in Christ (1 Tim 1:7; cf. Gal 2:4). Whether the matter at hand was opposing circumcision, marriage, food, or other works of the law, Paul is adamant that any type of legalism being taught as the premier avenue to holiness is demonic. So, while I agree that the problem in 1 Timothy 4 was a collapsing of rules for different ages, I believe the ages conflated were the present and the past, not the present and future. In other words, demonic teachers were mixing Law and Grace dispensations, not Grace and Kingdom dispensations. Either way, the point remains that if not interpreted dispensationally, Christians can unwittingly follow doctrines of demons.

### **Concluding Implications in the Contemporary World of a Dispensational Framework for 1 Timothy 4:1–5**

This paper has argued that if one does not interpret 1 Timothy 4:1–5 within a dispensational framework they are susceptible to following demonic aberrations of Scripture rather than Scripture itself. The ancient problem of false teachers and false teachings that plagued the churches of the NT continue their course by harassing churches today. Modern extreme cases of cultic mass suicides and sieges notwithstanding, most false teaching in the contemporary world vying for Christian allegiance disguises itself in more subtle forms of legalism. Such was the case with the church at Ephesus in 1 Timothy 4. Apparently, Paul thought two specific doctrines were dangerous enough to attribute directly to demons, despite their subtlety and perennial popularity. Religious teachers who force marriage and dietary restrictions onto believers in Christ is a demonic phenomenon still occurring. Driven by hermeneutics that fail to make crucial dispensational distinctions, there have been scores of Christian ascetics throughout Church history who assigned levels of personal holiness to negations of pleasures. As the examples of Rabbinism earlier demonstrate, such is a deviation from Scripture with an unfortunate heritage in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Contrary to those who argue that the church is divinely prevented from satanic deception<sup>61</sup>, there are those today who unwittingly bind themselves to demons. The ancient tactic of shackling believers in this economy of grace to regulations that governed the economy of law continues to impede the Church. Roman Catholicism’s laws of celibacy for priests and nuns, for example, have not kept the Church pure in any sense. Instead, they have resulted in mountains of sexual impropriety and cover-up scandals. Recognizing such restrictions as deviant human tradition, Luther launched one of the first critiques of

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<sup>60</sup> Lane’s translation of βρωμα as merely “meats” (and not “sustenance” or “foods”) based on the risen Jesus’s example of eating fish and honeycomb is hardly convincing to support the food-prohibition in 1 Tim 4:3 (166).

<sup>61</sup> E.g., Howard, 157.

clerical celibacy when he married a nun, Katharina von Bora. Likewise, Calvin articulated a positive and covenantal view of marriage seeing it as a blessed union that showcases the gospel.<sup>62</sup> His marriage to Idelette de Bure was an encouragement for others who felt the oppressive strain of Catholicism's marriage laws to do likewise.

But Protestantism has its bad legacy as well. There are multiple sub-traditions and fringes attaching personal holiness to rigid marriage and food laws. This ranges from Mary Baker Eddy's *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* serving as the central text for Christian Science, to Seventh Day Adventism's insistence on vegetarianism and strict adherence to kosher food laws, and even to celebrity evangelicals like Rick Warren's bestselling *Daniel Plan* diet-franchise. Each, in their own way, suggest a legalistic frame of holiness through OT laws of marriage or food, much like medieval rabbinic teaching before them. All such movements are, according to 1 Timothy 4, spearheaded by demons and not Scripture.<sup>63</sup> As Köstenberger cautions, "The disparagement of marriage and certain foods is not a true mark of godliness.... In fact, these kinds of stipulations are demonically inspired. Likewise, today we must not be fooled by achievements of human self-effort, which may seem impressive on the outside but detract from the gospel of grace in Christ."<sup>64</sup>

Paul understood it was precisely because of their subtlety, backed by a supposed piety, that made these two dogmas so dangerous. He dealt with the same problem in Galatia as Judaizers were luring believers away into a legalistic relationship with God and Messiah (Gal 2:11–14). This led him to declare: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (5:1). He dealt with it in his letter to Rome as Jewish-Christian and Gentile-Christian relationships were being torn over the same matters. For them, he wrote, "Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats" (Rom 14:20). In 1 Timothy 4, Paul continued this line of thought, condemning the same teaching that places burdens on Christians and robs them of enjoying good gifts from the good Creator: "For everything created by God is good," he wrote, "and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer" (vv. 4–5)."<sup>65</sup>

Though there was a time for certain restrictions concerning marriage and food for specific purposes of Israel, they have been lifted for the Church to enjoy freely (cf. James 1:17). In Paul's words to the saints at Rome, "You are no longer under law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). Therefore, a dispensational framework for 1 Timothy 4:1–5 could not be more relevant since it acts as a safeguard from keeping Christians from following doctrines of demons instead of the Christ of Scripture.

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<sup>62</sup> For both Luther's and Calvin's view on marriage, see Kelly M. Kapic and Wesley Vander Lugt, *Pocket Dictionary of the Reformed Tradition* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 73.

<sup>63</sup> This is not to say that every diet plan is demonic! There are even good principles to follow in Warren's Daniel Plan, for example, that are even based on NT readings. Still, the subtle message these diets portray to the unsuspecting (ie, biblically illiterate) Christian is that eating a certain way will advance their sanctification or even invoke God's special favor and/or love for them. To that end, they are demonic and/or false.

<sup>64</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 143.

<sup>65</sup> After drawing linguistic insights from each Greek phrase in the passage, Knight, 193, sums up 1 Tim 4:1–5: "In short, the truth of the good creation of God, whose purpose is to provide for people's needs, coupled with an appropriate response and acceptance is the correct teaching and the antidote to the false teaching."