

The Divine Council Worldview Conference 2026
 “The Unseen Romans: Finding the Gods
 and Reframing the Conversation on Homosexuality in Romans 1:18-2:11”
 Dr. Jordan Coss

Introduction

Rom. 1:18–2:11 is frequently treated as the New Testament's primary text in debates surrounding homosexuality. While Paul's discussion of same-sex relations is undeniably significant, both affirming and non-affirming interpretations have become disenchanted by overlooking the supernatural worldview that structures Paul's argument.¹ Building upon insights from Michael Heiser's *The Unseen Realm* and the Deut. 32 worldview, this paper argues that Romans 1:18–2:11 is best understood as a cosmic retelling of Babel, humanity's idolatrous rebellion, and the disinheritance of the nations under corrupt spiritual powers. Recovering this framework reenchants Rom. 1 and offers a more theologically robust paradigm for the Church's conversations on homosexuality that ultimately supports the non-affirming reading but from an angle the church is currently missing.

Human Captivity to the Gods in Romans 1:18-2:11

Michael Heiser once observed that “Rom. 1:18-25 is the New Testament equivalent of Deut. 32:8-9.”² This remarkable insight was not further elucidated leaving one to ask, where can the reader see the Deut. 32 worldview at play in Rom. 1:18-2:11?³ In a recent study by David Burnett, he proposed that the creature list in 1 Cor. 15:39-42a is actually based off of Deut. 4:15-19 instead of the traditional general consensus of Gen. 1; which also serves as a window into the wider connections of the Deuteronomistic Scriptural matrix within the chapter and book.⁴ Significantly, he substantiates Heiser's insight by noticing that Paul also quotes Deut. 4:15-19 in

¹ The term disenchanted comes from Charles Taylor which communicates the doubt and disbelief in the transcendent within the immanent frame of the age of authenticity. Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007); see also, James K. A. Smith, *How Not to be Secular: Reading Charles Taylor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014).

² Michael Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015), 113.

³ Jae Hyun Lee argues based on his discourse analysis that Paul's opening argument in Romans starting in 1:18 actually extends through Rom. 2:11, creating one section with two main units: Rom. 1:18-32 and Rom. 2:1-11. Unit 1 is composed of three subunits (1:18-23, 1:24-27, 1:28-32) while unit two is composed of two subunits (2:1-5, 2:6-11). Lee's analysis helps form the boundaries and reveal the structure of the passage, helping not only to not limit the immediate analysis of the mention of homosexuality to just 1:18-32 like many, but also making sure we scan the entire territory of argument within which Heiser saw the Deut. 32 worldview at play. Jae Hyun Lee, *Paul's Gospel in Romans: A Discourse Analysis of Romans 1:16-8:39* (Boston: Brill, 2010), 99-100, 151-53.

⁴ David Burnett, “A Neglected Deuteronomistic Scriptural Matrix for the Nature of the Resurrection Body in 1 Cor 15:39–42,” in *Scripture, Texts, and Tracings in 1 Corinthians*. Edited by Linda Belleville and BJ Oropeza (Minneapolis: Fortress Academic, 2019), 203.

Rom. 1:23 as “an essential part of the background” of Paul’s argument.⁵ Following Burnett’s lead and methodology, this paper will explore how Paul incorporates Deut. 4:15-19 in Rom. 1:23f and allow that to serve as a window to notice other possible connections to the Deuteronomic matrix, or Deut. 32 worldview, within the passage and book.

First, Paul’s use of Deut. 4:15-19 in 1 Cor. 15:39-42a substantiates the claim of its use in Rom. 1:23. Burnett observes that the terrestrial creature list in 1 Cor. 15:39 is not based on Gen. 1 because it is “in reverse order, the celestial bodies do not follow the same naming pattern, and Gen. 1 fails to account for the structure of the cosmos post Gen. 11.”⁶ However, the terrestrial creature list in 1 Cor. 15:39 follows the same descending order as in Deut. 4:16b-18 and includes a pivot statement delineating between terrestrial and celestial creatures.⁷ He also notes that the lack of “reptiles” in the 1 Cor. 15:39 terrestrial creature list is inconsequential as it appears in both creature lists in Deut. 4 and Gen. 1. Furthermore, the Deut. 4 creature list connection between 1 Cor. 15:39 and Rom. 1:23 leads one to notice many other “crucial neglected connections...[which] further aid in solidifying the argument that Paul draws on the creature list of Deut. 4:15-19 in 1 Cor. 15:39-42a” and vice versa for Rom. 1:23f.⁸

Second, the terrestrial creature list in Rom. 1:23 models after Deut. 4:15-19 instead of Gen. 1 similarly to 1 Cor. 15:39-42a. In fact, the same arguments apply to Rom. 1:23 not being based on Gen. 1. It is in “reverse order” as well compared to Gen. 1, “the celestial bodies do not follow the same naming pattern,” and “Gen. 1 fails to account for the structure of the cosmos post Gen. 11.”⁹ The terrestrial creature list in Rom. 1:23 actually follows the same descending order as in Deut. 4:16b-18 but with animals and birds switched. On top of that, Paul uses a similar pivot statement starting in Rom. 1:24 to delineate between the terrestrial creature list and his discussion of the celestial beings though Burnett does not mention Paul’s reference to the celestial beings. Furthermore, Paul does include “creeping things” or reptiles in the Rom. 1:23 list unlike 1 Cor. 15:39-42a, but he does not include fish. Again, this is inconsequential as the Dt. 4 and Gen. 1 lists both include fish.

Third, the same terms “image” (*eikon*; Deut. 4:16) and “likeness” (*homoïoma*; Deut. 4:12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 23, 25) occur in parallel in both Deut. 4:16 and Rom. 1:23.¹⁰ Though “image” does occur in Gen. 1 (v26-27), it is found predominantly in anti-idolatry contexts including 14 times in Dan. 2 and 3. Similarly, though “likeness” appears in Gen. 1 (v26), it is not the same term as in Deut. 4 and Rom. 1. *Homoïoma* itself is found in other anti-idolatry contexts as the second commandment (Ex. 20:4) and Ps. 106:20 as well. In the end, Paul’s choice of vocabulary in regards to these two terms more closely aligns with Deut. 4, *eikon* plus *homoïoma*, than Gen. 1, *eikon* plus *homoïosis*.

⁵ Burnett, “Deuteronomic Matrix,” 202, 205 n5.

⁶ Ibid., 189.

⁷ Ibid., 189-90.

⁸ Ibid., 202, 205 n5.

⁹ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰ Ibid.

Fourth, the anti-idolatry hendiadys “worship and serve” found in the celestial creature list in Deut. 4:19 (cf. Deut. 17:3, 5:9, 8:19, 11:16, 29:26, 30:17) is also utilized by Paul in Rom. 1:25. This formula is first found in the second commandment in Ex. 20:5 and was also used by Jesus in opposition to Satan in Matt. 4. Paul uses the same term for “serve” (*latreuo*) but a different term for “worship” (*sebazomai*) compared to *proskuneo* in Deut. 4:19. But this is an indicator that Paul actually does mention the celestial creatures in Rom. 1:24f as will be further seen below.

Fifth, Rom. 1:23f has the same progression from terrestrial to celestial creatures that is to be expected since Paul referenced Deut. 4:15-18. The gods of the nations of Deut. 4:19 are found in the thrice repeated word pairing “exchanged” and “handed over” (Rom. 1:23a, 24-28) which are taken from Ps. 106:20, 41 (Ps. 105 LXX; cf. Jer. 2). Gaventa notes the repetition “marks it as crucial to the passage, perhaps even to the whole letter...and signals a major concern or key issue.”¹¹ Goodrich observes the terms “became a basic narrative schema consisting of Israel exchanging God through idolatrous practices and, in turn, God surrendering Israel into the hands of hostile forces (cf. Neh. 9:26-31; 4Q Pseudo Daniel 243/244).”¹² Furthermore, Paul’s allusion to Ps. 106 in Rom. 1:23 is another connection to his earlier letter in 1 Cor. 10:20 where he warned the church not to sacrifice to the *shedim* or demons, the gods of the nations (Ps. 106:37; Deut. 32:17).¹³ So it is within this dual allusion to Ps. 106 and Deut. 4:15-19, Sinai and Babel, Jew and Gentile, threefold emphasis and narrative schema, where we find not only the *elohim* of the nations but the mention of homosexuality as well.

“Exchanging glory” in Rom. 1:23a is an idiom basically meaning to switch allegiances to the gods of the nations from the Most High.¹⁴ It references the golden calf incident at Sinai which is the archetypal exchange of many exchanges within Israel’s narrative though the term does not appear anywhere else besides Jer. 2 (Ps. 105:20 LXX; cf. Jer. 2:11 LXX). The utilization of Ps. 106, on top of Deut. 4:15-19, activates a Deuteronomistic scriptural matrix nova effect that now includes explicitly Ex. 32. Seen through the lens of Deut. 4 and 32, Sinai seems to be Israel’s Babel moment where the exchanged-handed over paradigm plays out because they “worshiped and served the creature rather than the creator” in both senses: calf and *elohim* (Rom. 1:25). YHWH’s wrath would have consumed Israel and started over with Moses (Ex. 32:10), if not for Moses’ intercession and YHWH’s character that forgives *adikia* (Ex. 34:6-7; Num. 14:18; Rom. 1:18, 29, 2:8). In the words of Ps. 106:23, “Therefore he said he would

¹¹ Beverly Gaventa, *Romans: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: WJK Press, 2024), 63-64. See also, Beverly Gaventa, “The Cosmic Power of Sin in Paul’s Letter to the Romans: Toward a Widescreen Edition,” *Interpretation* 58.3 (July 2004): 229-40; Beverly Gaventa, “God Handed Them Over: Reading Romans 1:18-32 Apocalyptically,” *ABR* 53 (2005): 42-53; Beverly Gaventa, “Neither Height Nor Depth: Discerning the Cosmology of Romans,” *SJT* 64 (2011): 265-78.

¹² John K. Goodrich, “Exchanging God, Surrendering Humanity: The Historical Plausibility of Paul’s Allusion to Psalm 106 in Romans 1:18-32,” in *The Beginnings of Paul’s Gospel: Theological Explorations in Romans 1-4* (Eugene: Cascade, 2023): 86.

¹³ Michael Heiser, “Does Deuteronomy 32:17 Assume or Deny the Reality of Other Gods? *Bible Translator* 59.3 (July 2008): 137-45; Burnett, “Deuteronomistic Matrix,” 197-98.

¹⁴ Goodrich, “Exchanging God,” 65; see Sigurd Grindheim, “A Theology of Glory: Paul’s Use of Doxa Terminology in Romans,” *JBL* 136.2 (2017): 451-65.

destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them.”

“Handed over,” or *paradidomi*, is arguably the most theologically significant term in the discourse while at the same time the most disenchanting in light of the Deut. 32 worldview (Rom. 1:24, 26, 28; cf. Deut. 32:30; Ps. 106:41, Jer. 2:24). “Handed over” implies being turned over to the gods of the nations of Deut. 4:19 who are later named in Rom. 8:38-39. Gaventa argues the term “comes from a military or conflict context and suggests the involvement of a third party to whom someone or something is turned over.”¹⁵ Furthermore, she argues the term insinuates “an identifiable agent, not an abstraction,” which is the way it is commonly treated today.¹⁶ In another connection with 1 Cor., Paul uses it the same way where he declares Jesus hands over “the kingdom to God the Father, after destroying every rule, and every authority and power” in fulfillment of Ps. 82 (1 Cor. 15:24; cf. 1 Cor. 5:5).¹⁷ And finally, the third party agent gods of the nations are specifically referenced, but predominantly missed, by three metonyms: handed over “to impurity,” “to dishonorable passions,” and “to a debased mind.”¹⁸ Stephen in his speech in Acts 7 alludes to Amos 5:25-27 where he connects more directly handing over with the host of heaven, star imagery, the specific gods Moloch and Rephan, and exile beyond Babylon (Acts 7:41-3).¹⁹ The consequence of human captivity to the gods results in unrighteous human behavior malevolently inspired by them manifesting in the sins outlined in Rom. 1:26-31 highlighting homosexuality in the second subunit (Rom. 1:24-27), and 21 vices in the third subunit (Rom. 1:28-32).²⁰

Finally, the Deut. 4:15-19 window brings Ps. 82 into view as there appears to be possible lexical and thematic parallels within Rom. 1:18-2:11.²¹ First, the gods of the council, later named rulers (Ps. 82:1, 7) are the same celestial creatures of Deut. 4:19, later named rulers by Paul (Rom. 1:23f, 8:38-39). Second, God’s impartial righteous judgment frames both Ps. 82 and the chiasm that forms the last subunit of the discourse (Ps. 82:1, 8; Rom. 2:6, 11) possibly in response to the partiality of the gods rule and human judgment (Ps. 82:2; Rom. 2:1-5). Third, the unjust (*adikia*) judgment (*krino*) of the gods (Ps. 82:2) inspires similar *adikia* (4x, Rom. 1:18, 29, 2:8) in human judges (*krino*, 3x Rom. 2:1). Fourth, the death sentence of the gods (Ps. 82:7) parallels the metonymic name given to them by Paul throughout the book starting in Rom. 1:32 as they produce human behavior that leads to death (cf. Ps. 118:18).²² Fifth, the fate of the

¹⁵ Gaventa, *Romans*, 64-65.

¹⁶ For instance, every author cited in this paper interprets handed over as an abstraction except for Beverly Gaventa.

¹⁷ Gaventa, *Romans*, 65; Burnett, “Deuteronomistic Matrix,” 199.

¹⁸ Gaventa, *Romans*, 65-70.

¹⁹ Goodrich, 86-87.

²⁰ Gaventa, *Romans*, 65; Lee, 114-22, 128.

²¹ Burnett, “Deuteronomistic Matrix,” 193-95.

²² Gaventa, *Romans*, 71.

nations (and Jews) oppressively ruled by the gods/rulers is the concern of both passages (Ps. 82:8; Rom. 1:23, 2:9-10). And finally, the condemnation (*katakrino*) theme of corrupt judges starting in Rom. 2:1 may be an echo of Ps. 82 and the fate of the gods (cf. Rom. 5:16, 18, 8:1, 34). Therefore, perhaps the real “sting operation” was not so much the comparison of his listeners to their Jewish and Gentile ancestors (Rom. 2:1-5), a common rhetorical technique (cf. Acts 7:51), but rather the comparison of his listeners to the gods of Ps. 82.²³ Every human, Jew and Gentile, is a participant in the cosmic rebellion.

In light of this Deut. 32 worldview lens in Rom. 1:18-2:11, homosexuality is highlighted within the idolatry-sexual immorality link that is found throughout Jewish literature from the Watchers story, to Sodom, to Sinai and more. This link is framed within the context of Paul’s explanation of Deut. 4:15-19 which is a key text in the enchanted Deuteronomistic matrix that sees the gods of the nations as the villains of the biblical story. This frame understands same sex relations as a highlighted illustration of humanity’s sins negatively manipulated by allegiance and captivity to the gods while also mirroring or paralleling their own sinful behavior using Ps. 82 as an intertextual reference. This enchanted frame is entirely negative and lends toward a non-affirming perspective of same sex relations but from an angle Christians of both persuasions currently miss. It must also be said that an argument based upon Gen. 1 and the creation account is not necessarily disenchanting, but an emphasis on Gen. 1 over Deut. 4 has led to a disenchanting reading and paradigm of same sex relations. Paul’s argument in Rom. 1 evokes the creation account of Gen. 1, particularly through its terminology and creature list, yet these Gen. echoes are subordinated to a more explicit and sustained engagement with Deut. 4. While Gen. 1 supplies the creational backdrop, Deut. 4 is the foregrounded text through which Paul develops his “most thorough statement of humanity’s ‘problem’ to which the gospel is the ‘solution.’”²⁴

The Destruction of the Gods in Romans 8:31-39

The same Deuteronomistic matrix of ideas can be found in Rom. 8:31-39 which “distills crucial elements in chapters 1-8,” functions as somewhat of a problem-solution bracket for the first half of the letter with Rom. 1:18-2:11, and supports the reading above.²⁵ In Rom. 8:31-32, Paul explains how God the Father is “for us” in relation to how he rescues humanity from those who are “against us” in his first rhetorical question (Rom. 8:31). This second phrase is “a clear expression of opposition” and references the dark powers whose hands God the Father handed humanity over into in the retelling of the Babel event in chapter 1.²⁶ The first and strongest piece of evidence for this is the fact that the term *paradidomi* reappears in Rom. 8:32 as one of three

²³ Goodrich, 86-87; N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God vol. 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 768; Richard Hays, “Awaiting the Redemption of our Bodies: The Witness of Scripture Concerning Homosexuality,” in *Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate* (Louisville: WJK, 1994), 9.

²⁴ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 764.

²⁵ Gaventa, *Romans*, 249.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 252.

verbs used as evidence that God is rescuing humanity from their supernatural enemies. This rescue comes about as a result of the Father not “withholding” (*pheidomai*) but rather “handing over” the Son, two terms that are paired at times in the Septuagint, into the implied hands of the gods of the nations (Rom. 1:23f; Deut. 4:19) or the “angels and rulers” (Rom. 8:38-39). This theologically loaded term encompasses the mission and purpose of Jesus set within the narrative background of Ps. 82 and its narration of the demise of the celestial gods of Deut. like 1 Cor. 15:20-28.²⁷ There the term communicates the fulfillment of Ps. 82:8, divine judgment and inheritance of the nations, the last of three parts of the eschatological event within the Deuteronomistic vision of the cosmos (1 Cor. 15:24a).²⁸ Here similarly, God the Father hands Jesus over into the hands of the gods of the nations that hold humanity captive (Rom. 1:18-2:11) precisely to destroy these very powers through his resurrection and thereby liberate humanity and fulfill Ps. 82:8.

In Rom. 8:33-34, the gods of the nations display their “against us” posture by “charging” and “condemning” to death “God’s elect” within Paul’s second rhetorical questions. This is in contrast to the “for us” posture of the Father who is “the one who justifies” and the Son who is “the one who died.” The term “condemn” (*katakrinō*) again recalls Paul’s first usage in Rom. 2:1 which possibly compares Paul’s listeners and the rulers or gods of Ps. 82 sharing a similar fate. The third and only other time this term appears is in Rom. 8:1-3 where God the Father “condemned” the gods metonymically named Sin through his Son’s flesh resulting in no death sentence for God’s elect.²⁹ Paul expands this thought in Rom. 8:34 mentioning Jesus’ resurrection (*egeiro*; 18x in 1 Cor. 15), Ps. 110:1 (cf. 1 Cor. 15:25), and intercession. Paul’s combination of resurrection and Ps. 110 “is not surprising” and encapsulates the first two of the three components of the eschatological event within the Deuteronomistic vision of the cosmos via Ps. 82: the “arising” of God, and the destruction of the gods or rulers (cf. 1 Cor 15:20-28).³⁰ Jesus’ resurrection fulfills “the arising” (Ps. 82:8a), and the quotation of Ps. 110:1 implies the fulfillment of the gods’ destruction (Ps. 82:7). Paul appears to be identifying Jesus as the Melchizedek figure (cf. Gen. 14; Ps. 110) who is the lord of the council in Ps. 82 within Qumran literature and carries out the judgments against the gods of the nations and frees his people from “Belial and from the hand of all the spirits of his lot” (11QMelch13; cf. Dan. 10:10-21; Wis. 3:7-8). It does so using the “allotment” language of the Deuteronomistic matrix (Dt. 4:19, 32:8-9).³¹

In the third and final rhetorical question and answer in Rom. 8:35-39, the gods of the nations display their “against us” posture by seeking to “separate” (Rom. 8:35, 39) Christians from the “for us” posture of the Father and Son’s “love” (Rom. 8:35, 37, 39). According to Gaventa, Paul lists seven circumstances of suffering in Rom. 8:35 that might cause the intended separation instigated by the agents later mentioned in Rom. 8:38-39.³² The first two

²⁷ Burnett, “Deuteronomistic Matrix,” 198-99.

²⁸ Ibid., 194, 198.

²⁹ Gaventa, *Romans*, 255.

³⁰ Burnett, “Deuteronomistic Matrix,” 199.

³¹ Ibid., 194-95, 199.

³² Gaventa, *Romans*, 259-60.

circumstances, tribulation and distress, are a pair found together not only in Rom. 2:9 as the punishment for evildoing for both Jew and Greek, but also in Deut. as curses for disobedience to the covenant (Dt. 28:53-57; cf. Is. 8:22-23, 30:6). Tribulation (*thlipsis*) itself is the only term found in Rom. 1:18-2:11 and Rom. 8:31-39 that's also found in Deut. 4 (v29) where God calls Israel to seek him with their whole heart and soul in the midst of tribulations resulting from their idolatry and subsequent exile. And though Gaventa doesn't consider this list of seven to serve as further metonyms for the gods, it is interesting to note that tribulation is listed together with wrath (*orge*) and fury (*thumnos*) (Rom. 1:18, 2:8) not only at the center of the chiasm in Rom. 2:6-11, but also in poetic parallelism to the sending of destroying (*poneros*; cf. Rom. 1:29) angels upon Egypt in Ps. 78:49 LXX. But whether metonym or circumstance caused by the gods, safety from exile and separation and the fate of the gods is certain within the love of the destroyer of the gods in light of this Deut. 32 worldview frame.

Finally, Paul lists ten alternating circumstances and agents in Rom. 8:38-39 "picturing human life under constant assault."³³ The last term, "any other creature (*ktisis*)," indicates that everything in this "against us" list is mere creation that fails to separate Christians from the incomparable "for us" love and power of the immortal God (Rom. 1:23). But the return of the use of creature (*ktisis*) draws the reader's attention back to its use in Rom. 1:25 where humanity worshiped the creature instead of the Creator (*ktizo*) in Paul's explanation of Deut. 4:15-19 and Ps. 106. Therefore, these creatures and other agent terms refer to the gods of the nations of Deut. 4:19 who are no match to the arisen Christ in their attempt to thwart the Creator's salvific mission set within the Deuteronomic vision of the cosmos. Heiser argues that Paul's use of these agent terms indicates that he was "aware of, grasped, and presumed the Deut. 32 worldview."³⁴ Similarly, Muddamalle reveals that Paul's use of powers (*dunamis*; cf. Rom. 1:4, 16, 20, 8:38) in Eph. connects back to the host of heaven and astral worship of Deut. 4:19 and therefore "is vital to establishing the connection between the language of Paul and the Deut. 32 worldview."³⁵ Finally, Johnson observed that the pairing "angels and rulers," their only use in Romans, along with the least used term "angels" compared to his most frequently used term "rulers" in Paul's listings, is synonymous with the pairing "principalities and powers" used eight times elsewhere in Paul (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21, 3:10, 6:12; Col. 1:16, 2:10, 2:15; Tit. 3:1); which refers back to the rebel *elohim* or gods of the nations in the Septuagint, particularly in Dan. 7:26-27.³⁶

So in Rom. 8:31-39, Paul casts the gospel solution to his most thorough statement of the problem of humanity in light of the Deut. 32 worldview as well.³⁷ He utilizes Ps. 82 once again identifying Jesus as the Melchizedek figure who through his handing over to the gods, arises

³³ Ibid., 262.

³⁴ Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 328-31.

³⁵ Muddamalle, *The Unseen Battle: Spiritual Warfare, the Three Rebellions, and Christ's Victory Over Dark Powers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2026), 126-28, 130, 178.

³⁶ Ronn Johnson, "The Old Testament Background for Paul's Principalities and Powers," (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2004): 174-201; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Vol. 38 Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 507-513.

³⁷ Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 764.

and destroys the rulers, angels, powers, and creatures in order to bring about the inheritance of the nations.³⁸ And so if “Rom. 1:18-25 is the New Testament equivalent of Deut. 32:8-9” using Deut. 4:15-19, then Rom. 8:31-39 is the New Testament equivalent of the fulfillment of Ps. 82 which was also used in framing the problem in Rom. 1:18-2:11.³⁹ This potentially supports the proposed reenchanting framing of same-sex relations as negatively inspired by and reflective of the sinful behavior of the gods. The following section will now explore the most popular and relevant affirming and non-affirming arguments in light of this rereading. Simply put, there is not a single argument today based upon this cosmic and theological frame of the text, and as a result every approach would benefit from reexamination. This means questioning exegetical, ontological, and hermeneutical disenchantment in each side's interpretations including the current state of the affirming debate which does not center around the maligned six proof texts so much as ethical and hermeneutical approaches which bypass the texts.

Non-Affirming Arguments: Genesis 1 and *Para Physin*

Robert Gagnon, like Richard Hays in the 1980's and 90's, now serves as the most prolific non-affirming voice since his 2001 work which “continues to be the largest and most in depth biblical study of the topic from a conservative position.”⁴⁰ There Gagnon argues the Gentile-only stance in Rom. 1:18-32,⁴¹ and that Gen. 1 forms the backdrop for Paul's argument and creature list, which then leads to an emphasis upon the *para physin* phrase as most important for coming to a non-affirming position.⁴² In response to the question, “Did Paul not have creation in mind when he spoke of same-sex intercourse?” he specifically argues against the notion that Paul is quoting Deut. 4 instead of Gen. 1 in Rom. 1:23.⁴³

Gagnon regards the connections to a Gen. 1 creation backdrop in Rom. 1:18-32 as “apparent” and “unmistakable.”⁴⁴ His evidence includes “the obvious allusions” such as creation and Creator (1:25, 20), the terms male and female (Rom. 1:26-27; cf. Gen. 1:27 LXX), as well as likeness, image, animals, birds, and reptiles. He finds it “striking” that the limited threefold combination of birds, animals, and reptiles in Rom. 1:23 appears in Gen 1:30 as well. Other possible allusions he lists include the lie (Rom. 1:25; Gen. 3), shame (Rom. 1:27; Gen. 3:1, 8),

³⁸ Burnett, “Deuteronomical Matrix,” 193-95.

³⁹ Ibid., 203; Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 113.

⁴⁰ Preston Sprinkle, “Introduction,” in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, Stanley Gundry, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016): 10; Robert Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics*, Nashville: Abingdon, 2001.

⁴¹ Gagnon relegates to a footnote a possible “subtle allusion in v23 to the Golden Calf episode mentioned in Ps 106:20,” but it seems to have no further influence upon his reading of Romans 1, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice*, 246 n9.

⁴² Gagnon, *Homosexual Practice*, 254-70.

⁴³ Ibid., 289-92.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 290.

knowledge (Rom. 1:19, 21, 28, 32; Gen. 2-3), and the sentence of death (Rom. 1:32; Gen. 1:27, 3:4-5, 20, 23).⁴⁵ He argues Paul's remarks throughout the rest of the book on the creation and fall of Adam and Eve further strengthens his Gen. 1 backdrop stance (Rom. 3:23; 5:12-21; 7:7-13; 8:19-21).⁴⁶

Gagnon believes that the passage speaks of events after the fall that happen because of it. He surmises, "for Paul all human rebellions are in one way or another rebellions against God's will for humankind set in motion at creation."⁴⁷ His proposed evidence and reasoning leads him to vehemently argue against a non-Gen. 1 backdrop, including Deut. 4, saying "it is not plausible at all."⁴⁸ Within this refutation of a non-Gen. 1 backdrop and creature list, he specifically references Dale Martin as an example of an opposing view, and cites Knut Holter-Stavanger's study while concluding "Deut. 4 is obviously the model for this negative echoing of Gen 1, but both the choice of terminology and the emphasizing of the sexual differentiation point back to Gen 1, rather than to Deut. 4."⁴⁹

In general, Gagnon's creation order argument focusing on Gen. 1-3 echoes and the *para physin* phrase (Rom. 1:26) can be considered disenchanted in light of Dale Martin's critique of Hay's non-affirming arguments, which are essentially the same as Gagnon.⁵⁰ For instance, though Gagnon specifically mentions Martin in disagreement, he falls prey to Martin's very point about non-affirming readings by claiming that "the etiology of homosexuality lies in the corruption of universal human nature that occurred in the fall."⁵¹ Both Martin and Gagnon agree that Rom. 1 refers to events after the fall, but Martin points to the Watchers story of Gen. 6 arguing that the passage is about the invention of idolatry and its consequences as Paul presupposes "a Jewish mythological narrative" context found in 1 Enoch and Jubilees, while Gagnon points back to Gen. 1-3 from unspecified events.⁵² Gagnon also does not interact with 1 Enoch, Jubilees, or Martin's proposed backdrop at all. Thus, it appears Gagnon is obviously aware of this line of reasoning, but functions like Hays as a primary example according to Martin of non-affirming disbelief in the logic of Paul's argument via an anti-supernaturalist Augustinian lens thus resulting in the flattened frame of a creation and fall backdrop to Rom. 1.⁵³

⁴⁵ Ibid., 291.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 292.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 289; Knut Holter Stavanger, "A Note on the OT Background of Rom 1:23-27," *BN* 69 (1993): 21-23.

⁵⁰ Dale Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville: WJK Press, 2006), 51-64; see also his article that came first, Dale Martin, "Heterosexism and the Interpretation of Romans 1:18-32," *BibInt* 3 (1995): 332-55.

⁵¹ Martin, *Sex and Single Savior*, 52.

⁵² Ibid., 53.

⁵³ Ibid., 54.

In particular, Gagnon's creation order argument can also be considered disenchanting in light of Heiser's Divine Council worldview and the reading above. For instance, both of Paul's scriptural echoes to Ps. 106 and Dt. 4:15-19 in Rom. 1:23f are mainly disregarded and relegated to single footnotes. There are seemingly many lexical parallels and echoes to Gen. 1-3 along with an emphasis on sexual differentiation, but it has been shown one can find those same echoes and more within Deut. 4:15-19 and the Deuteronomic matrix window it opens. Gagnon admits that "there is no connection to idolatry in Gen. 1" compared to Dt. 4, but still deemphasizes the idolatry context leading to an emphasis of *para physin* (Rom. 1:26) as the single most important argument for the creation order backdrop based off of the Gen. 1 exegetical decision instead of the thrice repeated word pairing exchanged-handed over based off a Dt. 4 reading and its expected order of the list of creatures. This leads to a flattening of idolatry and subsequent loss of the *elohim* of the nations referenced in Dt. 4:19 specifically and implied in the now disenchanting term *paradidomi* and corresponding metonyms within this cosmic conflict argument. This results in the spiritual warfare frame between humanity and the gods of the nations who instigate the depravity listed out in Rom. 1:24-32, including homosexuality, becoming moralized and distorted. Therefore, homosexuality itself becomes flattened in this disenchanting natural theology apologetic reading and the conversations in many non-affirming churches de-supernaturalized.

Preston Sprinkle is another evangelical non-affirming scholar that has written on this subject extensively in the last ten years.⁵⁴ He also considers Rom. 1 to be "the most important passage in the debate."⁵⁵ At first, it appears that he takes the Gentile-only perspective in Rom. 1:18-32 like Gagnon, but in an endnote he reveals that he actually takes the all humanity view based upon the allusion to the Jews as well in Ps. 105:20 LXX in Rom. 1:23a.⁵⁶ But exactly like Gagnon, Sprinkle argues for a Gen. 1-2 creation backdrop and creature list that then leads him to emphasize *para physin* (Rom. 1:26) as "perhaps the most important phrase in this passage."⁵⁷ In his section titled "God's Design in Creation," he cites the same evidentiary allusions to the creation account as Gagnon and states, "this can't be anything other than intentional."⁵⁸ And exactly like Gagnon, he cites Holter-Stavanger's article in another endnote but with no mention or discussion of Deut. 4 as a possible alternative backdrop. He also similarly cites Dale Martin as an example of those who argue against a Gen. 1 backdrop but once again without any

⁵⁴ Preston Sprinkle, *People to be Loved: Why Homosexuality is Not Just an Issue* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); Preston Sprinkle, *Does the Bible Support Same-Sex Marriage? 21 Conversations From An Historically Christian View* (David C. Cook, 2023); Preston Sprinkle, "Introduction and Conclusion," in *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, Stanley Gundry, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016): 9-16, 217-26; Preston Sprinkle, "Paul and Homosexual Behavior: A Critical Evaluation of the Excessive Lust Interpretation of Romans 1:26-27," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 25:4 (2015): 497-517.

⁵⁵ Sprinkle, *People to Be Loved*, 87.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 89, 208.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 93; see also, Sprinkle, "Paul and Homosexual Behavior," 509-12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 91-93; see also, Sprinkle "Paul and Homosexual Behavior," 512-14.

discussion of his proposal.⁵⁹ Essentially, Sprinkle makes the exact same disenchanted creation order natural theology apologetic argument as Gagnon.

Gagnon and Sprinkle are the most prominent representatives of this most popular and common conservative non-affirming interpretation of Rom. 1 today. Basically, when one argues for the Gen. 1 creature list in Rom. 1:23, then the phrase *para physin* is emphasized above all else in a creation order natural theology apologetic argument against homosexuality. Affirming scholars such as Gaventa understand that this reading “simply misses the point.”⁶⁰ The Deut. 32 worldview framework of Paul’s argument supports that assessment. Martin also believes most modern Christians do not know of any other option to read Rom. 1, but would not even believe in an Enochian or reenacted backdrop if they heard it.⁶¹ Ultimately, non-affirming Christians rightly argue same-sex relations are sinful, but by taking a different path than Paul’s actual “supporting logic.”⁶² It then appears, ironically, that Gagnon and Sprinkle match Martin’s disenchanted ontology regarding the historicity of the Watchers event, which contributes to a disenchanted exegesis of Rom. 1. But once again, it is not that an emphasis upon Gen. 1 is the problem as there definitely is a creational backdrop; rather, the problem lies in the explicit denial of Deut. 4:15-19 being present and Paul’s primary conversation partner in the creature list and beyond shaping his language and theological logic. This miss reframes same sex relations away from the enchanted frame building off of the creational backdrop as one expression of humanity’s larger participation in the cosmic rebellion inaugurated at Babel and perpetuated through idolatry and the corrupt spiritual powers.

Affirming Arguments

Dale Martin, the affirming scholar both Gagnon and Sprinkle highlight but do not engage, advocates for an idolatry context in light of the Watchers narrative in specific opposition to “the fall of Adam” backdrop emphasizing Gen. 1 and *para physin* by Richard Hays.⁶³ His conclusion, however, states this “etiology of homosexual sex is one no modern scholar has advocated as factual.”⁶⁴ So though he is right in pointing toward the Watchers narrative as a better key to understanding Paul in Rom. 1 over 30 years ago, his stance is ultimately ontologically disenchanted as well. He takes the Gentile-only perspective in Rom. 1:18-32 and argues Paul is saying homosexuality did not exist before Gentile idolatry and polytheism, was not a problem among Jews and Christians, and would cease if idolatry and polytheistic worship stopped.⁶⁵ He

⁵⁹ Ibid., 208-09.

⁶⁰ Gaventa, *Romans*, 62.

⁶¹ Martin, *Sex and the Single Savior*, 55.

⁶² Ibid., 55.

⁶³ Ibid., 52.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 56.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 54.

does not discuss Deut. 4 or Ps. 106 in Rom. 1:23, misses Paul's inclusion of all humanity, and flattens and moralizes the exchanged-handed over pairing and metonymic phrases in reference to the gods of the nations. His take could be categorized as the assumptions or presuppositions approach, which considers Paul's beliefs about homosexuality to be subjective and culturally conditioned similar to Gaventa, William Loader and many others.⁶⁶

Richard Hays, the scholar Martin focused his critique on, argued for the traditional disenchanted non-affirming reading of Rom. 1 which Gagnon and Sprinkle built upon.⁶⁷ He also specifically refuted the particular affirming argument from John Boswell which offered a counter interpretation of *para physin* as referring only to promiscuous heterosexuals and not all homosexual sex since it is crucial to the non-affirming reading.⁶⁸ Hays continued to stand by this exegesis of Rom. 1 despite changing to an affirming position at the end of his career.⁶⁹ Hays believes God changed his mind sometime after Paul penned Rom. 1, despite still believing that Rom. 1 teaches against all forms of homosexual sex, except Paul did not have in mind modern covenanted same-sex relationships.⁷⁰ This change of mind resulted from "refocusing the conversation on larger narrative patterns and precedents in the Bible" using trajectory and divine character hermeneutics.⁷¹

⁶⁶ William Loader, "Reading Romans 1 on Homosexuality in the Light of Biblical/Jewish and Greco Roman Perspectives of Its Time," ZNW 108.1 (2017): 149; Gaventa, *Romans*, 70.

⁶⁷ Hays, "Redemption of Our Bodies," 7-8; see also, Richard B. Hays, "Homosexuality," in *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996): 379-406.

⁶⁸ Hays, "Redemption of Our Bodies," 9; see also, Richard Hays, "Relations Natural and Unnatural: A Response to John Boswell's Exegesis of Romans 1," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 14 (1) (1986): 184-215.

⁶⁹ Christopher B. Hays and Richard B. Hays, *The Widening of God's Mercy: Sexuality Within the Biblical Story* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2024): 245, 223, 206. He points readers to Beverly Gaventa's detailed exegesis of Rom. 1 in her new commentary if they desire textual validation for his new argument; Gaventa, *Romans*, 54-81.

⁷⁰ Hays and Hays, *Widening*, 206. Hays now says that "Paul was not thinking of covenanted same-sex partnerships as we know them today" in passages like Rom. 1.

⁷¹ Karen Keen calls Hays' hermeneutical approach the Divine Character approach which considers the awareness of God's character (esp. mercy) as the key for correctly interpreting Scripture on ethical matters concerning sexual minorities. It is an overall hermeneutic that also consists of what's called trajectory hermeneutics, which "makes arguments that go beyond Scripture's explicit statements based on seeds and glimpses within Scripture itself." It is more than a standard Gentile inclusion argument, though Hays now finds that compelling as well. Rather, Keen argues that Hays' argument goes beyond simple trajectory and instead is grounded within the greater Divine Character hermeneutic. The question and answer to Hays' mercy hermeneutic is, "A merciful God responds to gay people and their predicament by affirming covenanted same sex relationships which is a means of grace that can help people in the same way as heterosexual people;" Hays and Hays, *Widening*, 134, 206-07, 223, 247; Karen Keen, "Preston Sprinkle vs Richard Hays: How Two Scholars Interpret the Bible Differently on Same-Sex Relationships," *Uncommon Saints*, October 18, 2024, <https://uncommonsaints.substack.com/p/preston-sprinkle-vs-richard-hays>.

Karen Keen is a prominent and current affirming scholar who summarizes the traditional non-affirming argument of Rom. 1 as “same sex desire is the result of the fall,” with Rom. 1:23 quoting the Gen. 1 creature list, and *para physin* implying procreation.⁷² She considers Rom. 1 “the text in the debate” which “hinges on gender and anatomical complementarity including the role of procreation.”⁷³ In her critique of this reading, she seeks to refute both the Gen. 1 backdrop and subsequent significance of *para physin*. She argues the meaning of *para physin* was based on “Paul’s Stoic inspired assumption that every human being is heterosexual and must conform to heterosexual desire and behavior” even though it leads to harm. She discredits the “alleged and perceived connections to Gen.1” noting Deut. 4:16-18 in an endnote which better matches the literary and theological context of Rom. 1.⁷⁴ However, she emphasizes Wisdom of Solomon as the primary text Paul is in conversation with instead of Gen. 1 or Deut. 4, “which has crucial implications for understanding the meaning of Rom. 1.”⁷⁵ Ultimately, Keen argues Rom. 1 “does not describe most gay and lesbian people,” or “peer-consensual same sex relationships,” or “gay people who love God,” or “Christians struggling with fallen natures,” or “ordinary gay and lesbian people.”⁷⁶ She states the common affirming argument that “biblical authors could not conceptualize this option in their cultural context.”⁷⁷ Paul rather discusses adult pagans who commit abusive forms of same sex activity common in the Greco-Roman world like pederasty, and sex with slaves and prostitutes.⁷⁸ And the only reason Paul rejected some same sex relations was due to non universal presuppositions within his Greco-Roman Hellenistic Jewish cultural context.⁷⁹

Keen and other affirming scholars do not believe the debate centers around what are referred to as the six proof texts anymore. The majority of her book discusses additional ethical and hermeneutical arguments “currently being overlooked” that ultimately supersede Rom. 1 no matter the interpretation.⁸⁰ But she still attempts both to refute the traditional interpretation and

⁷² Karen Keen, *Scripture, Ethics, and the Possibility of Same-Sex Relationships* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018): 22, 28.

⁷³ Keen, *Possibility*, 25, 40-41.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 123, 37.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 38; see Jonathan Linebaugh’s studies for a response to affirming authors use of Wisdom: Jonathan Linebaugh, *God, Grace, and Righteousness in Wisdom of Solomon and Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, Texts in Conversation (Boston: Brill, 2013); Jonathan A. Linebaugh, “Announcing the Human: Rethinking the Relationship Between Wisdom of Solomon 13–15 and Romans 1.18–2.11,” NTS 57 (2011): 214–37; Jonathan A. Linebaugh, “Wisdom of Solomon and Romans 1:18-2:5: God’s Wrath Against All,” Blackwell, Ben C., John K. Goodrich., Jason Matson, eds. *Reading Romans in Context: Paul and Second Temple Judaism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015): 38-45.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 20, 39, 41, 26.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 23, 18, 39, 41.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 19-20, 23.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-114.

argue Rom. 1 does not actually prohibit same sex relationships today. Her critique of the non-affirming argument shows why affirming scholars have recognized for at least 30 years what the Deut. 32 worldview lens also reveals- the fall and Gen. 1 is not the primary text within Rom. 1 to read it accurately.⁸¹ However, affirming refutations of the traditional conservative interpretation, though correct in some ways, are themselves inconsequential in light of the Deut. 32 worldview as well. Furthermore, her Excessive Lust reading, which includes the idea that Paul's argument is based upon non-universal presuppositions about sex, is disenchanted and has the same problems as other affirming and non-affirming arguments today. First, Loader considers all affirming attempts that conclude Rom. 1 does not speak against all same-sex relationships as basically fundamentalist arguments.⁸² Second, Deut. 4:16-18 is recognized but relegated to an endnote, which arguably provides greater implications to the meaning of Rom. 1 than Wisdom as seen above. Third, she takes the Gentile-only stance and misses the inclusion of all humanity as is common in affirming takes that associate Paul's words with only contemporary pagan Greco-Romans.⁸³ Fourth, it appears, like Martin, that Keen disregards the Enochian etiology of evil as ahistorical and one of the non-universal presuppositions of Paul, and thus is ontologically disenchanted.⁸⁴ And finally, the Deut. 32 worldview also simply shows that the debate is not just about six proof texts, but rather a matrix of interconnected ideas and texts seen through the window of Deut. 4:15-19, the vast majority of which do not specifically mention homosexuality but still contribute to its enchanted framing. The debate certainly does transcend the six texts which specifically mention homosexuality, but affirming readings also "miss the point" in light of the Divine Council worldview framework of Paul's argument which also can serve as a counter ethical, trajectory, and divine character hermeneutic.

Conclusion

The Excessive Lust argument is a prominent disenchanted affirming view promoted by Matthew Vines, The Reformation Project, Keen et al and is one specific reading the Deut. 32 worldview substantially challenges as a case in point.⁸⁵ Vines and others do not recognize the significance of Deut. 4:15-19 in Rom. 1:23f and thus moralize and de-supernaturalize the exchanged-handed over word pairings and metonymic phrases referencing the gods of the nations holding humanity captive in Rom. 1:24-28. They therefore lose the gods and the Deuteronomic vision of the cosmos context by overly literalizing Paul's terminology turning the

⁸¹ See Loader, "Reading Romans," 129-30.

⁸² Ibid., 145-48.

⁸³ See Jewett's "inclusive problem" argument in his commentary; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Short Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013); see also, Robert Jewett, *Romans*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006).

⁸⁴ See Michael Heiser, *Reversing Hermon: Enoch, the Watchers, and the Forgotten Mission of Jesus Christ* (Crane, MO: Defender, 2017), 105.

⁸⁵ Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014): 97-121.

metonymic phrases into references to abusive and over-indulgent same sex sexual activity among Gentiles of the Greco-Roman social context summarized as Excessive Lust.⁸⁶ Vines downplays the importance of the passage overall in his attempt to argue Paul is not talking about loving and consensual same sex relationships saying, “it is not central to Paul's overarching message.”⁸⁷ This deemphasis does not recognize the role Ps. 82 plays in the Deuteronomic matrix of ideas in both this significant statement of humanity's problem as well as the solution found in Jesus the destroyer of the gods in Rom. 8:31-39.

Heiser's insight about Rom. 1:18-25, substantiated by Burnett with Deut. 4:15-19, opens the window to find the gods in the thrice repeated exchanged-handed over narrative schema and metonyms leading to rediscovering not only the supernatural cosmic conflict present within Paul's restatement of humanity's problem in Rom. 1:18-2:11, but also the enchanted Judeo-Christian perspective on homosexuality.⁸⁸ The Deut. 32 worldview's “moral logic” casts same-sex relationships in a non-affirming manner as behavior and *adikia* influenced by and parallel to the Watchers and gods of the nations.⁸⁹ And if God will judge the unrighteous rule of the Watchers and gods, then how much more the human imagers of his reconstituted council who also act just like them. This reenchaned ethic is universal and pivotal to the entire story-arc of Scripture, yet unseen in the conversation today. And though this angle will not resolve every issue in the current debate, Heiser's legacy gives Christians reenchaned eyes to engage in dialogue with more theological depth, clarity, and imagination.

⁸⁶ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 100, 104.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁸⁸ Heiser, *Unseen Realm*, 113; Burnett, “Deuteronomic Matrix,” 202, 205 n5; Goodrich, “Exchanging God,” 86; Gaventa, *Romans*, 64-70.

⁸⁹ Vines, *God and the Gay Christian*, 103.

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