

In a recent Times article, the reporter Emma Goldberg wrote about how the rise of social media and influencer power has made it such that young people, in particular, find their livelihood, success and sense of self inextricably entwined with an online presentation. She wrote, “With personal branding, the line between who people are and what they do disappears. Everything is content.” A strange, exhausting new twist in being human is that each day, each of us must decide how much of ourselves, our family life, thoughts, work, photos and feelings we will share with strangers online...

**Tish Harrison Warren**

An Anglican priest reflects on matters of faith in private life and public discourse.

**The Temptations of the ‘Personal Brand’ – Opinion New York Times**

Jan. 29, 2023



...Goldberg quoted Tom Peters, a marketing writer, who explained that, we are each “head marketer for the brand called You.” To reduce ourselves to brands, however, is to do violence to our personhood. We turn ourselves into products, content to be evaluated instead of people to be truly known and loved. We convert the stuff of our lives into currency.....Klein confessed that social media had made him hungry for validation. It offers us, he said, a steady drumbeat of “You exist. You are seen.” This longing to be seen and validated is universal, but this desire has been co-opted by technologists to capture more and more of our time and attention.

...This new way of interacting with the world is driving institutional dysfunction, personal anxiety and the hollowing out of ourselves. In this morass, religious faith ought to have something to offer. Though the Gospel that Christians proclaim has never needed to be put in quite these terms, increasingly part of the good news that churches must offer people is: I am not a brand; you are not a brand; we are not a brand.

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# Romans

SERMON SERIES

## Romans 1:1-7

<sup>1</sup> Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup> which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, <sup>3</sup> concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh <sup>4</sup> and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, <sup>5</sup> through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations, <sup>6</sup> including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ, <sup>7</sup> To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

# Paul's longing for the church in Rome

## Romans 1:8-15

<sup>8</sup> First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed in all the world. <sup>9</sup> For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you <sup>10</sup> always in my prayers, asking that somehow by God's will I may now at last succeed in coming to you. <sup>11</sup> For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — <sup>12</sup> that is, that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

# Paul's longing for the church in Rome

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<sup>13</sup> I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup> I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup> So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

# How we tend to read the Bible

## Romans 1:8-12

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Churches and other religious institutions are meant to be places where people in all their maddening complexity might be truly known and loved not for their performance but for their inherent value, not as avatars or online personalities but as whole human beings...

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# Don't mistake minor characters for the star

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## Psalm 2:7-8

<sup>7</sup> I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. <sup>8</sup> Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession."

## Psalm 22:27

<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the Lord,  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before you.

# When God's will and my wants don't align – Part I

## Romans 1:9-10

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Valentin de Boulogne  
(1591-1632), *Saint Paul  
Writing His Epistles*,  
oil on canvas  
99.38 mm x: 52.38 mm  
Museum of Fine Arts,  
Houston

# The equalitarian nature of God's people

## Romans 1:11-12

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These institutions, at their best, offer a reaffirmation that there is an internal essence of a person that can never be reduced to a brand, that we have parts of ourselves that are beyond the reach of likes. They can remind us that we are made for embodied relationships with people who are committed to us and that looking to an online crowd to fulfill our desire to be loved will most often leave us more lonely and insecure. They can assure us that we are made, as the Christian faith teaches, not to perform but to live as people known and loved by God and by others.

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When death's dark shadow's at my feet  
When I am plagued by unbelief  
The price my flesh has paid for me  
By precious blood identified  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah

When death's dark shadow's at my feet  
When I am plagued by unbelief  
The price my flesh has paid for me  
By precious blood identified  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah



# When God's will and my wants don't align - Part II

## Romans 1:13

<sup>13</sup> I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as well as among the rest of the Gentiles. <sup>14</sup> I am under obligation both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish. <sup>15</sup> So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

# When God's will and my wants don't align – Part II



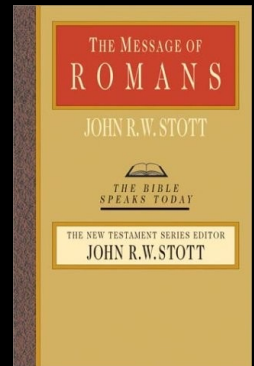
# **“I’m in your debt”**

## **Romans 1:14–15**

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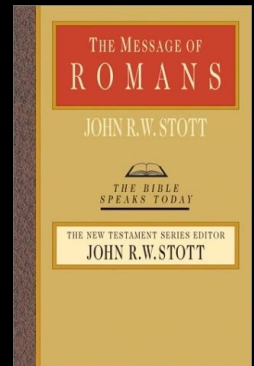
The NIV *I am bound* and the RSV ‘I am under obligation’ should properly be translated ‘I am [a debtor]’ (AV). It is perhaps puzzlement over how and why the gospel could be a debt which has led translators to write more generally of ‘obligation’. There are, in fact, two possible ways of getting into debt...

John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 59.



...The first is to borrow money *from* someone; the second is to be given money *for* someone by a third party. For example, if I were to borrow \$1,000 from you, I would be in your debt until I paid it back. Equally, if a friend of yours were to hand me \$1,000 to give to you, I would be in your debt until I handed it over. In the former case I would have got myself into debt by borrowing; in the latter it is your friend who has put me in your debt by entrusting me with \$1,000 for you. It is in this second sense that Paul is in debt.

John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Romans: God's Good News for the World*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 59.



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**“I’m in your debt”**

**1 Corinthians 9:16**

<sup>16</sup> For if I preach the gospel,  
that gives me no ground for boasting.

For necessity is laid upon me.

Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!

Do you see how Paul's longing for the church in Rome  
as a picture for us of how much God longs for us?

Are you a part of Hope—not to perform but—to live  
as people known and loved by God and by others?





...that we may be mutually encouraged  
by each other's faith...

