

I wanted to follow up on a comment that I made in my last post about all of Paul's letters being "occasional" (i.e., written to deal with certain situations that had arisen in his churches), with one partial exception: his letter to the Romans. Now would be a good time to explain why Romans is the exception. Here is what I say about the occasion and purpose of Romans in my discussion of the book in [The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings](#).

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In one important respect the letter to the Romans is unlike all of Paul's other letters: it is written to a congregation that Paul did not establish, in a city that he had never visited (see 1:10-15). Given what we have already seen about Paul's sense of his apostolic mission, this should immediately give us pause. Paul's other letters were written to deal with problems that had arisen among those whom he had converted to faith in Christ. That clearly is not the case here. Why, though, would he be writing to someone else's congregation (See Box 1)?

At least on the surface, Paul does not appear to be writing to resolve problems that he has heard about within the Roman church. The issues that he discusses appear to relate instead to his own understanding of the Christian gospel. This is clearly the case in chaps. 1-11; but even his exhortations in chaps. 12-15 are general in nature, not explicitly directed to problems specific to the Christians in Rome. Nowhere, for example, does he indicate that he has learned of their struggles and that he is writing to convey his apostolic advice (contrast all of his other letters). Is it possible then that he simply wants to expound some of his views and explain why he holds them? This is possible, of course; but why would he want to do so for a church that he has never seen?

There may be some clues...

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