

churches which are located in different places. With respect to both these, we turn for light to the records of the New Testament.

It has always been a difficult problem how to reconcile the practical working of a system which results in a number of churches wherever believers multiply in large towns or cities, with the records of the New Testament, which seem to imply that there was only one church in each city. On the face of it there is a manifest difference between our practice and that of apostolic times; and it is often used as an argument against Congregationalism that whereas the New Testament speaks of the churches of Judea, of Galatia, of Asia, of Macedonia,—it never speaks of the churches of Jerusalem, or of Antioch, or of Corinth, or of Rome. It is alleged that it *would* do so, had the order of the apostolic churches been the same as our own, inasmuch as the number of believers was too great in those cities for all to meet in one place, and to be united under the same pastor. Here is an argument for a system analogous to Presbyterianism or Episcopacy, viz., one church, but divers congregations; which, it is alleged, would more nearly conform to apostolic practice.

A closer study, however, of the apostolic records brings out a presumption that in some of those cities there was a plurality of churches; not, perhaps, strictly corresponding to the independent churches of the present day, but still, separate assemblies of believers. There was of course at that time no such thing as a church-building, and we are left almost entirely in the dark as to the places where any great gatherings of Christians were held. It is evident, however, that the ordinary meetings of the brethren were mostly in hired rooms, such as the school of Tyrannus at Ephesus, or the upper chamber in Troas, from which Eutychus fell; or the house of Justus at Corinth, in which Paul preached for eighteen months; or the hired house at Rome, in which he preached for two years, and received all who came to him. Now, in those private houses, assemblies of believers were held of so regular a character as to be called churches. In Rome there was a church in the house of Aquila and Priscilla; in Colosse there was a church in the house of Nymphas; and it is evident that there were other assemblies in Rome, which, though not called churches, were really such. The apostle, in his epistle, sends salutations to Asyncritus, Phlegon and others, and the brethren which are *with them*; and then again to Philologus, and Julia, and Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are *with them*. These were evidently little companies of believers—churches, in fact; and it is questionable whether, when salutation was sent to Aristobulus' household, and also to the household of Narcissus, the household is not a spiritual one—the same thing being intended.

It is obvious, however, that while there were separate assemblies, there was such a complete oneness of sentiment amongst them, and such an identification of interest and affection, that the apostle could address one epistle to them all, and exhort them all as one body. As one body they are entreated to mark those who caused divisions amongst them, not, be it marked, divisions into separate assemblies for greater convenience of fellowship, or greater facility for spreading the truth, but divisions contrary to Christian doctrine, divisions of family affection, divisions of the one body into opposing elements.

It is interesting to notice in what respects they are treated as one, as this may give us the key to the relation which the churches of our own day in the same city ought to bear to each other.