

Speaking to the soul



Fellowship

For you have been given not only the privilege of trusting in Christ but also the privilege of suffering for him. We are in this struggle together. You have seen my struggle in the past, and you know that I am still in the midst of it. Philippians 1:29–30

We don't know the exact nature of the problems in the Philippian church. It had been planted in a hostile environment and was led by new Christians who were

doubtless still trying to get their heads around Christian doctrine and practice. I often hear people say that it would be good if we could get back to being like the early Church, but I'm not so sure. It may have had the blessing of newness and enthusiasm, but battled with many critical problems that we would never have to face. We also have huge resources of Christian experience and literature to draw upon.

Paul offered the Philippian church the huge encouragement that they were not alone. Paul knew exactly what they were going through, and they had the benefit of seeing him at work. They knew the struggles that he had experienced, and were also aware that he continued to be up against huge challenges. Paul empathised, as he could enter into the experience that they were going through.

From time to time, I hear people say that they don't need to go to church because they can worship perfectly well in their back garden. I am, of course, absolutely delighted that their garden is so inspirational, but nothing can take the place of Christian fellowship. We need one another. Churches aren't perfect – they are often agonisingly imperfect – but sharing life with frail human beings just like ourselves is exactly what we need. As we face up to the challenges and sharp edges of life we need, just like the Philippians, to hear someone say to us “we're in this struggle together”.

QUESTION

When have you been particularly aware of the empathy and support of other Christians?

PRAYER

Loving God, thank you for the blessing of Christian fellowship. Amen