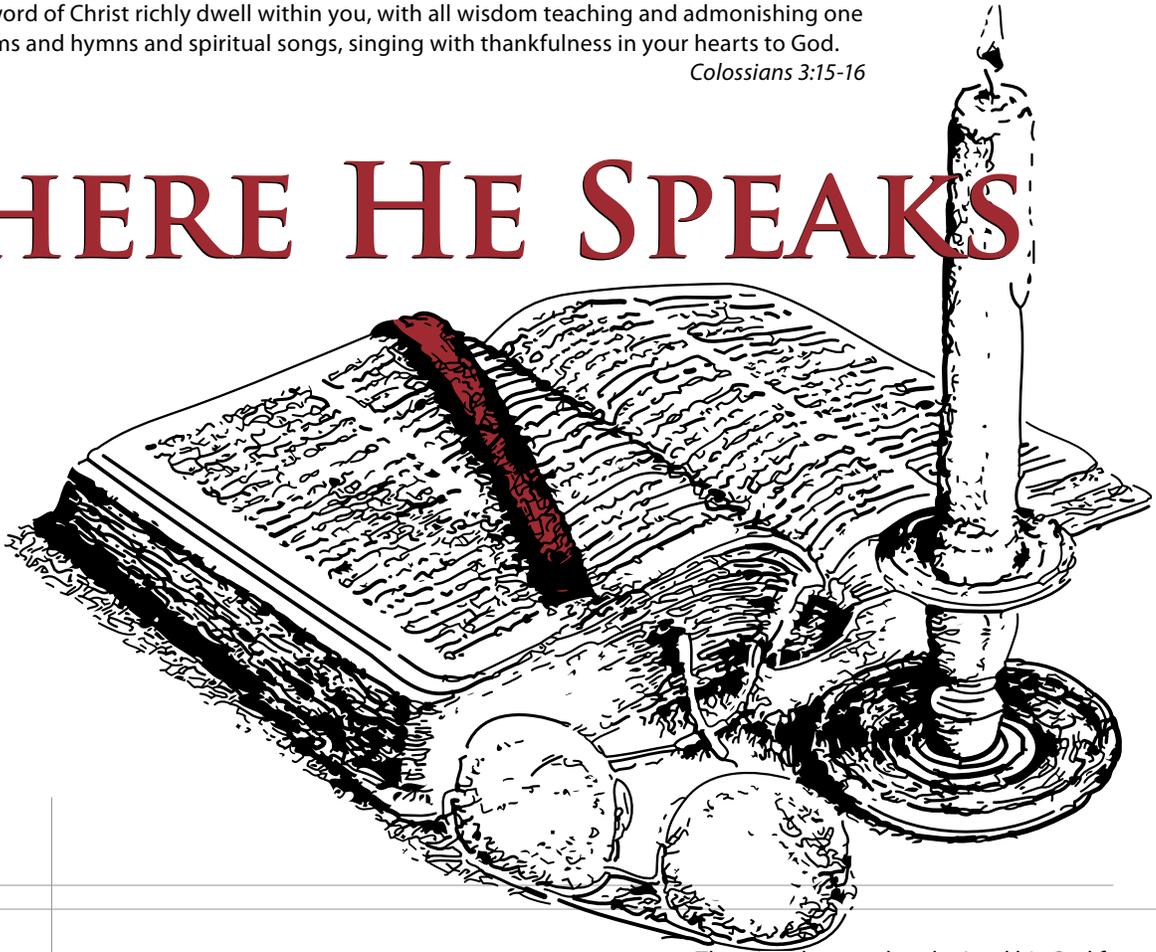


Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God.

Colossians 3:15-16

THERE HE SPEAKS



BACK IN THE DUSTY, COBWEBBED CAVERNS of my childhood were years of Sunday School, of sitting in a circle of miniature chairs, and staring transfixed as a teacher taught us stories from the Bible using her trusty flannel graph propped on an easel, or that perennial favorite, *Egermeier's Bible Story Book*.

One of the more popular stories, of course, was the tale of "Jonah and the Whale," and the persistently lingering image from the story was of Jonah, trapped inside the sea beast, praying for God to save him—a prayer God answered three days later when the whale delivered the errant prophet onto dry land. The clear impression left on those spongy prepubescent brains was that the whale practically snatched Jonah in mid-air when he was thrown overboard by the sailors, and that the Lord punished his disobedience by jailing him in the fish for a few days until he got his mind right.

But that is not what happened at all—as Jonah himself relates in his subsequent psalm of praise.

Then Jonah prayed to the Lord his God from the stomach of the fish, and he said, "I called out of my distress to the Lord, And He answered me.

I cried for help from the depth of Sheol; You heard my voice.

For You had cast me into the deep, Into the heart of the seas, And the current engulfed me.

All Your breakers and billows passed over me. So I said, 'I have been expelled from Your sight. Nevertheless I will look again toward Your holy temple.'

Water encompassed me to the point of death. The great deep engulfed me, Weeds were wrapped around my head.

I descended to the roots of the mountains. The earth with its bars was around me forever, But You have brought up my life from the pit,

O Lord my God.

While I was fainting away, I remembered the Lord, And my prayer came to You, Into Your holy temple."

Jonah 2:1-7

It is all there in print. Jonah was thrown overboard and began a perilous, grueling descent beneath the

waves. He was drowning, convinced he was going to die. But the gracious Lord—*Jehovah-adonai, elohim*—had arranged for a great fish (not a whale, but probably a great white shark) to be on-station to save the prophet. The fish was not a punitive prison, but a miraculously timed bathysphere to save him from a watery grave and return Jonah to the surface!

He wasn't praying *for* salvation while inside the fish, he was giving thanks for the salvation he had *already received*.



God's word was written to be *read*—not just listened to. It was meant to be consumed unfiltered. The teacher or commentator is an invaluable help, but nothing will replace the experience of the saint in solitary communion with God through the personal reading and studying of His word.

There He speaks, while we reverently listen.

His written word is a very human book. Through its Author, its Enabler, its scribes and its characters, we come to learn of holiness, righteousness, and evil; overwhelming obedience and faith, and cynical betrayal; honesty and deceit; purity and depravity. The Bible is a bottomless well of knowledge and insight into the truths of God. In it we learn of His

personality and methods, His vocabulary and reason. We discover through both proclamation and narrative the qualities of God that make Him unique: His omnipotence, His omniscience, His Holiness and power.

It is a tragedy of the first order that so many Christians—those who claim to be Bible *believers*—never actually *read* it.

Learning about God through the words of someone else, while potentially worthwhile, is like getting to know Him through snapshots sent through the mail. Reading His word through ourselves, from beginning to end, is like *living* with Him. You begin the journey at the point of His first moment with this world and man: the Creation. You end the journey at the moment at which this world, as we know it, ceases to exist, and a new relationship with God begins. Between these two epochal end caps lies a fascinating tapestry of deity creating, shaping, and mingling with the grind of life upon this earth.

To forfeit this fascinating and compelling narrative in favor of spoon-fed, secondhand snippets, is to have only an insipid, diaphanous acquaintance with God and His Son. But to read—actually sit down and digest—every word He has written for us, is to enjoy a deep and profoundly rewarding relationship with its Author. ☪

**The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul;
The testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever;
The judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether.
They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold;
Sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb.**

Psalms 19:7-10

