Who loves precious metals? (17:3)

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts.

THE TEXT (NASB)

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests hearts.

The fining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold: but the LORD trieth the hearts. KJV - Proverbs 17:3

INTRODUCTION

Silver and gold are precious to us, but not to the LORD. He wants us to want treasures of greater value, to be willing to work and wait until the pure treasure is ready.

Even silver and gold are not appreciated until first purified and tested. A refining process burns off impurities, skimming off the base metals in the ore, so the pure metal itself can be extracted, and they're then heated to be properly assayed. It's a brief, but "uncomfortable" process with permanent benefits.

So why are precious metals universally cherished?

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COMMENTARY

Intense Heat Required

In their natural state, silver and gold are intermixed with a thousand other elements. The dirt is easily removed, but extracting the precious metal from even high-grade ore needs careful smelting and refining—intense heat in a carefully-controlled environment. Silver melts first at a temperature of nine times the boiling point of water. That refining pot is not hot enough for gold, though, which needs a furnace hitting 1,064 °C, almost eleven times the boiling point of water.

Isolating and Refining Silver

Silver is a metallic element (symbol Ag, from the Latin Argentum) with the atomic number 47, indicating its quite stable number of protons. Several dangerous impurities are found in silver ore, like sulphur, arsenic, and chlorine; plus non-precious metals like copper, lead, mercury, and zinc. The type of extraction method applied to the ore depend on whether the major metal is copper, zinc, or lead.

Refining the ore usually begins with smelting. Metals liquefy at different temperatures, allowing them to be separated by progressive heating. Silver is harder than gold, but softer than copper. Pure silver is the best conductor of heat and electricity among the metals. Until the mid-20th century, silver was commonly used to make coins. Now a copper nickel alloy is used.

Pure Gold

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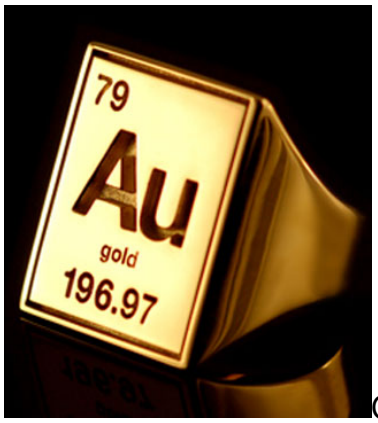

Gold (symbol Au, from the Latin Aurum) has an atomic number of 79, a very stable number of protons, resistant to corrosion and giving it a lovely yellow colour and soft metallic glow. Gold alloys are measured by karats, equal to a twenty-fourth part in a blended alloy. So 18-karat gold is three-quarters pure, while 24 karat (24K) is pure gold. Because of its beauty, corrosion-resistance and rarity, gold has been used everywhere from time immemorial as a store of monetary value.

In 1971, the United States began to abandon slowly the gold standard for fixing the US dollar, and stopped circulating gold coins. For many years the price of gold was deliberately pegged at $35 ounce (or the dollar pegged at 1/35th of an ounce), largely due to the Bretton Woods Accord. By 1973, gold stood at $42 US, and since then, it has soared (or the value of paper currency plummeted), rising and falling in relation to the industrial demand and monetary insecurity. Gold remains internationally a quasi-currency, with national paper often bench-marked against it. The value of gold stocks may decline periodically on the equity markets, as with the BRE-X scandal of the mid-1990's, but such dips are brief.

Precious metal refining is a complex process involving both intense heat and close observation by the refiner. As technology has improved, it's become possible to refine silver and gold to almost 100% purity. Visit the following website to find out more about refining gold and silver.

Gold is Cherished Internationally

Gold has always been cherished. It's portable, a convenient vehicle for trade, and globally accepted. Sometimes countries are forced to use their gold reserves to make payments, when their currency becomes worthless beyond their borders. My father once told me about an experience in World War II, times worse than now, when a prisoner, about to be strip-searched,

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secretly swallowed a gold nugget to hide it, at least for a day or two.

There is strong evidence for the enduring value of gold in the Bible; it is elevated as an object of worth and beauty, always to be desired. It's assayed and distinguished from low-grade ore in Genesis 2:12 and Revelation 21:18. Gold is highlighted in the Garden of Eden, the Ark of the Covenant and the Heavenly City. The only physical material that might receive more prominence is water.

Yet, even more profound then God's intention to underwrite this metal, is its comparison with the value of His Word—the laws, precepts, testimony, and judgments of God Almighty in the Bible. We read in Psalm 19:10 that God's word is "more desired than gold, yea than much fine gold." So... would God allow gold to become commonplace or worthless? Unlikely, or His comparison of relative value would become meaningless. It would be ludicrous for God to say, "My word is more valuable than wood." So God has committed Himself to sustaining the relative value of gold as a commodity.

Refining Hearts

How does the analogy of refinement apply to human hearts?

According to the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (TWOT)*, the Hebrew word for "tests" here, בחן (bā•ḥăn, pronounced "bah-khan"), falls midway between meaning "to put to the test" or "tempt," and "to smelt or refine." Bā•ḥăn denotes examining to determine somethings essential qualities, especially its integrity.

In this proverb, the word for "hearts" refers to the invisible inner-self, not the physical organs in our chests. The Hebrew word for "hearts," לב (lēḇ, pronounced "lĕv"), usually indicates our three, distinct spiritual functions: Emotions, will, and thought. It refers to our "self," inner personality or spirit.

How Does the LORD Test Hearts?

The testing and refining process comes through trials/ tribulations but also through praise/success.

Someone once said, "Don't ask for an easy life; ask to become a stronger person." Inner strength brings the capacity to live life more fully. Yet inner strength, like outer strength, must be developed through exercise and effort. Many passages in the Bible explain life's difficulties and unexpected calamities as the refining process in the providential hands of a sovereign God. Some view troubles this way, and some don't. Once in the land of Uz (likely in modern Arabia), a very wealthy man named Job lost all his possessions, all his children, and even all the comforts of health. So his wife advised him to "curse God and die," Job 2:9. But Job saw his

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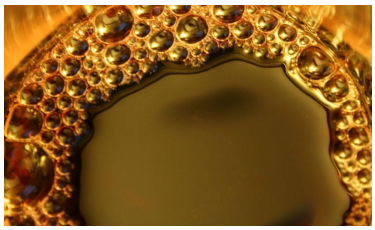
enormous calamities as a major testing and refining process from the hand of an all-powerful God. Job said, “God knows the way I take. When he has tried (tested and refined) me, I shall come forth as gold,” Job 23:10.

Surprisingly, the LORD also uses praise/success to refine hearts. The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and a man is tested by his praise (Proverbs 27:21). How? We all prefer praise rather than criticism, but praise must be handled properly lest it lead to pride. We must learn to deflect the praise to God and to those who have helped us, lest we (a) feed our own egos (b) become full of hubris and (c) stumble. Pride goes before a fall. One of the greatest composers of all time was Johann Sebastian Bach. He signed all his musical compositions with "SDG" short for "Solo Deo Gloria" - all the praise for this piece belongs to God alone. Bach knew that humans were not made to retain praise but to spread it around.

Controlled Heat



God knows how much heat we can take. If metallurgists focus to refine silver and gold, imagine how much more care the infinitely intelligent God applies in refining human hearts. God has a higher perspective, treasuring things that last forever, beyond death. He often uses worldly things as teaching tools, giving and taking to decrease our dependence on things and increase our dependence on Him.

Silver and gold are valuable only for a brief time. We all reach a point in life when gold and silver mean less than nothing. For many, that point doesn’t come until their deathbed. Ask a wealthy man in palliative care which he’d rather have: Another ten million dollars or another ten healthy years? Learning silver and gold’s limited value, early in life, lets us redirect our energy toward greater treasures.

Seeing Past the Shine

Why does the Bible use precious metals in this analogy? Maybe it reveals similarities between the shine or glory of precious metals and much rarer, much more precious spiritual glory (shine).

People the world over are attracted by bright objects—some diamonds, some rhinestones. Early explorers sometimes traded colored glass with the natives for necessary supplies. People like glitter, like a polished limousine, attracted by its glow. Yet people the world over know naturally, almost instinctively, that there’s another existence where we truly shine.

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Supernatural Shine

The Bible speaks of brightness, a glorious radiance, from a supernatural source. It's not reflected light, a chemical reaction nor a radioactive emission. That sparkle is spiritual. We sometimes catch tiny glimpses in the eyes of a toddler, staring in wonder into our eyes. It's a tiny sparkle of the radiant glory of God! When artists depicted God's saints in stained glass, they often used a halo to express this aura of radiant joy and peace.

Examples of Spiritual Shine

- The Bible says that "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all," I John 1:5.
- When Moses spent time alone in the presence of God, Moses' face shone so brightly that he had to wear a veil over his face, so others wouldn't be blinded as they looked at him (Exodus 34:33).
- When Solomon dedicated the temple, the glory of God Almighty—known as the Shekina glory—was so bright that the priests could not enter the temple (2 Chronicles 7:2).
- When Jesus Christ showed his supernatural nature to his closest followers on a mountaintop, "He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light," Matthew 17:2.
- When Paul and his companions were on the road to Damascus, they were struck down by a unbearably bright light—not the sun, as Jesus Christ directly confronted Paul (Acts 22:6).

God does not deny the attraction of precious metals, but uses them to alert us to much greater wealth. The expression, "all that glitters is not gold," warns us against worthless imitations like "fool's gold" or pyrite that merely look like it. Yet "all that glitters is not gold" can be turned around: "Gold is not all that glitters."

A Radiant Glow

Consider the glow of a radiant countenance—a beaming face from a pure heart. Think about the glorious glow that God wants to develop in our human hearts! They're more precious and harder to refine than silver and gold. Their value extends both sides of the grave.

We read in Daniel 12:3 that those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars. This doesn't mean we cease to be human, but our skin will become literally radiant. That's what happened to Moses when he spent time "face to face" with God Himself (Exodus 34:30-33). Jesus too was brilliantly transformed (Matthew 17:2). Just as stars have different intensities, so the saints will shine for eternity with our own power. However, gold will be no more valuable than cobblestones (Revelation 21:21).

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OUR CREATOR, REDEEMER, AND FRIEND

Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God,” Matthew 5:8.

Purity of heart is a very precious prize, but requires a painful process (Acts 14:22).

God tells us to give much attention to our inner selves and hidden motives (Matthew 23:26, James 4:8). Real faith and trust in God is more precious than gold and yields unimaginably magnificent benefits (1 Peter 1:7).

APPLICATION

- Memorize the text in your favourite Bible translation and think about it often.
- Use precious metals as part of your investment portfolio, but also recognize their limited and temporary value.
- Cooperate in the inner refining process by focusing your thoughts on Philippians 4:8.
- View your current trials and tribulations as a testing and refining process from God—not as pointless punishment from a sadistic sovereign or as chance happenings.

Which of these steps, if any, does Jesus want you to take now? Ask Him.

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KEY WORDS

contentment, diligence, folly, gold, heart, LORD, more assets (quantity), silver, bf saving

ILLUSTRATION

Who is Quick Buck Betty?

Quick Buck Betty wants to make money fast, and is always looking for “hot tips.” Researching and understanding investments takes too long; she just cares about the returns—especially the short-term returns.

It doesn’t matter how the money is earned—in fact she’d rather not know at all! Betty is just eager to “make it” or, even better, have someone else make it for her. She has little time for Steady Eddy and Diligent Daniel—their methods take too long.

Betty views the stock and bond markets like the lottery and casino. She doesn't invest; she gambles. She likes to "play" the markets. Day trading is one of her passions.

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