

CHARACTER OF GOLD

Last week it was reported in the news that prospectors in Australia dug up a gold nugget weighing over half a kilo from an area long abandoned for mining. Some smaller nuggets were found nearby, and this resulted in tourists flocking to the area in search of a fortune. The current price of gold is over \$1800 per ounce, so it is eagerly sought after indeed!

Gold is an extremely valuable, precious commodity. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* says: “No other possession in all time has been so zealously and effectively guarded.” People have gone to great lengths to get it and to keep it. Over the centuries, the word “gold” has acted on people like a fever as they have rushed and struggled to claim it in places where it has been discovered, in what is known as a gold rush.

In the 1500’s, various Spanish conquerors sought gold in the lands of the Aztecs and Incas in South America. In those days, a legend grew up about a land rich in gold called El Dorado, where gold was supposed to be as common as sand. Many explorers set out to find this fabulously wealthy city of gold, and in the course of those explorations much of northern South America, including the Amazon river, was mapped, but the fabled city was never found.

Well, I’m happy to report that I have news for you today—I know where El Dorado is and before the end of the sermon, I’m going to tell you where—so keep listening closely!

Last weekend we celebrated our golden anniversary, so I thought it would be good to think a little more about gold and consider what God says about it. And He says quite a bit: the Bible talks about gold from Genesis to Revelation.

It’s mentioned as early as Genesis 2:11, the first metal mentioned in scripture.

Genesis 2:11-12 ¹¹ “The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.)

So it was desirable to men from the earliest of times!

Genesis 13:2 “Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.”

Abraham’s great wealth was measured in part by his holdings of gold.

Genesis 24:22 “When the camels had finished drinking, the man took out a gold nose ring weighing a beka and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels.”

Golden jewellery was a gift of the greatest value.

In the NT we read about gold too, but this is a different kind of gold.

1 Corinthians 3:12-13 ¹² “If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will

bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work."

God expects us to be building with gold! Obviously this isn't speaking of physical gold, or we wouldn't be doing very well! It's obviously talking about godly, spiritual character we should be building. Our character is compared to gold, silver and other precious stones.

In the Old Testament temple, lots of gold was used. There are many, many verses about that in the book of Exodus. David also collected huge quantities of gold for the construction of Solomon's temple. But the temple nowadays is a spiritual one (verses 9 and 16)—we are the building—and the temple is made out of spiritual gold rather than physical gold.

That spiritual gold is the character we are building—character that stands up to and endures the fiery trials of our Christian life (verse 13).

If we are not growing and overcoming in our lives, and are building weak spiritual character, it is compared to wood, hay and stubble that will burn up when exposed to fiery trials of faith. But if we are building righteous godly character, it is compared to gold and precious stones which are further refined and purified by fiery trials!

That's why Jesus said what He did in Revelation 3:18 "I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see."

The Laodiceans were being told to build the right type of godly character that would endure the fire of trials, rather than the lukewarm attitude that they had (verse 16).

God compares the type of character we should be developing to fine gold. So if we look at some of the qualities that make gold what it is, this will help us understand better some of the qualities we should be seeking to incorporate in our spiritual lives. Developing that godly character should be what our lives are focused around, so let's see how much we can learn from this biblical analogy. We can be involved in a gold rush—for better character! Let's consider some of the qualities of gold.

1. First of all, gold is beautiful. It has a soft yellow lustre and glow which makes gold objects very attractive. The colour and quality of gold appeals to us more than the other metals.

Likewise, a Christian with the character of spiritual gold is attractive and appealing, if not to other people, definitely to God. A deeply converted, growing Christian has a special quality of spirit nothing else can match—the inner glow of God's spirit radiating God's nature outwards.

1 Peter 3:3-4 ³"Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. ⁴ Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight."

This says that our beauty should not come from physical gold, but from spiritual gold. Rather than wearing physical gold on the outside, we're to be developing the spiritual gold of this type of character inside; character which makes us beautiful to God.

Proverbs 3:13-15 ¹³“Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding,
¹⁴for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. ¹⁵She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.”

Proverbs 8:10, 19 ¹⁰“Choose my instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather than choice gold... ¹⁹My fruit is better than fine gold; what I yield surpasses choice silver.”

Galatians 5:22-23 lists 9 special attributes of a godly person—the fruits of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faith and self control. The more these fruits of God’s Spirit abound in our lives, the more golden our character becomes in God’s sight. And it will be noticed by others around us too—it makes us different from the rest of the world, and it is beautiful.

2. Gold is stable and enduring, long lasting. It is basically impervious to the ravages of time, not tarnished by air, water or most corrosives, and it can be melted down many times without reducing its quality.

It is of course physical, and therefore corruptible—all physical things decay over time, and are temporary. But of all physical things, it is one of the longest lasting. Not many things can be melted down time and time again without reducing their quality! Think what happens when you melt down cheese? Wood? Plastics? But golden objects buried thousands of years ago still have their original lustre and beauty, when uncovered by modern archaeologists. One article I read on gold said: “Since gold is indestructible, infinitely reusable and treasured everywhere and always, most of what has been plucked, scratched and dug from the earth for 6,000 years is believed to be still around.”

Is our character stable and enduring like that?

1 Corinthians 15:58 “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.”

This shows what it should be like. We have to resist the trials and cares of life, the character-destroying temptations of Satan’s world around us. God wants us to be faithful and obedient to Him, no matter what corrosive influences are at work, trying to eat away the purity of God’s character in us.

3. Gold reflects light. Thin gold leaf has been placed on the outer surfaces of many American space craft to reflect the intense heat radiation encountered in outer space. Without this protection, the temperature inside the craft would rise dramatically and endanger the people and things inside.

Gold is also added to some window glass to reflect the sun’s energy—reducing air-conditioning expense but still letting light through the window largely unhindered.

In John 8:12, Jesus said “I am the light of the world.” But in Matthew 5:14 He said “You are the light of the world.” So who is the light of the world, Jesus, or us as His people? Both! His light comes to us, and because we have character like spiritual gold, we reflect that light to the world around us! How?

Matthew 5:16 “In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.” Through our good example of living according to God’s law, doing good works.

We also know that the Bible is spiritual light:

Psalms 119:105: “Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”

As we live according to that word, we will reflect the light of God’s way to the world around us. So our good character is like a shining light.

4. Gold is malleable and ductile—the most malleable and ductile of all metals. By malleable, we mean it is able to be crushed and beaten in all directions. It can be beaten into sheets only 3 millionths of an inch thick. It would require 3,000 such sheets to equal the thickness of a 3 x 5 card. This is called gold leaf—one ounce of gold can be beaten into 16 square metres of gold leaf. Astronauts’ clothing contains a coating 6 millionths of an inch thick, and that’s enough to shield them from radiation and solar heat. On a fireman’s mask, it protects the face from the fiercest temperatures without blocking vision. Ductility means it can be crushed in one direction and drawn out into a thin strip. One ounce can be drawn into wire so thin it could stretch 50 miles.

It is a joy for a craftsman to use gold—it’s not brittle like pottery or glass, or hard and unmanageable like iron. It is soft and flexible, and retains its brilliance through all of that beating.

God is the craftsman who works with us spiritually, building our character. Is our character easily worked with, like gold? Are we yielded to God’s working in our lives? Are we humble and receptive to correction and instruction, without resisting or breaking?

Lamentations 4:1-2 ¹“How the gold has lost its lustre, how the finest gold has become dull! The sacred gemstones are scattered at every street corner. ²How the precious children of Zion, once worth their weight in gold, are now considered as pots of clay, the work of a potter’s hands!”

Verse 1 Gold is physically very slow to tarnish, but in the face of a time of trouble such as is being talked of in this book, it is nothing.

Verse 2 An interesting verse showing how God’s people are comparable to gold—spiritual gold. We are precious to God. And we are the work of the hands of the potter—clay or gold in the hands of God our potter.

Romans 6:13 “Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to Him as an instrument of righteousness.”

We must be willing to yield ourselves completely to God. Baptism is unconditional surrender to God, where we say “whatever you want to do with me God, please do it”—and that’s the attitude we must continue to have.

5. Gold is rare, or scarce, and difficult to obtain. That’s a major reason it is so precious and valuable. A lot of hard work and expense goes into extracting it from the ground, and there isn’t a lot of it around.

In some mining operations, to produce one ounce of pure gold, around 20 tons of rock must be processed, and sometimes the gold is found miles below the earth's surface.

Similarly, godly character is scarce, it is rare and difficult to come by in this world. But it is so precious that because of just the small group of elect people who are that spiritual gold, the whole world will be saved from destruction (Matt 24:22).

God values that spiritual gold of godly character very highly, because it is something even He cannot create instantaneously—it takes our active participation too, to develop character, because it is the result of free choice of the person in whom the character is being formed.

It requires effort for that character to be built. It's not enough to want godly character. You must be willing to work for it with all your being! There are many scriptures we could turn to which show us how we must be diligent in seeking salvation. Let's just look at one example.

1 Corinthians 9:24-25: ²⁴ “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. ²⁵ Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.”

But of course we need to emphasise that we can't develop spiritual character just by ourselves. No matter how much work we do, it is useless unless it is done by the Spirit of God in us.

6. Gold is purified by heat. The *World Book Encyclopaedia* describes how gold is removed from ore. Note the comparison between the obtaining of pure gold, and the way our character is gradually turned into pure spiritual gold!

“How Gold is Removed from Ore (the rock containing the traces of gold)

“Crushing and milling reduce gold ore to dust-like particles. The process begins when a crusher breaks the ore into fragments. Water is added to the crushed ore to form a mixture called *pulp*. A rod mill grinds the pieces of ore in the pulp into particles, which are then pulverized in a ball mill.” Our trials are like crushing, grinding and pulverizing, with the water of the Holy Spirit washing through our lives!

“After that, **smelting** removes many of the impurities from the gold precipitate. The gold is mixed with a chemical substance called *flux* and melted in a smelting furnace. Such impurities as copper, iron and zinc combine with the flux and are eliminated as *slag* (solid waste). The remaining molten gold is made into bars. But these gold bars are impure, containing about 90% gold mixed with silver and other metals.



“After smelting comes **refining**. The gold is often brittle and is refined to make it suitable for use in industry. The gold is melted in clay pots and a stream of chlorine gas is bubbled through it. The chlorine reacts chemically with the impurities that are present, and the impurities rise to the surface of the molten gold where they are skimmed off.”

Job 23:10 “But He knows the way that I take; when He has tested me, I will come forth as gold.” We go through trials in life, so that the character of spiritual gold is gradually developed, as all the impurities in our human nature rise to the top and are skimmed off.

Proverbs 17:3 “The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but the LORD tests the heart.” Gold is purified in the furnace. Our hearts, our minds, our spiritual character, is purified in the trials of life.

Isaiah 48:10 “See, I have refined you, though not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction.” Affliction is compared to a furnace.

Daniel 12:10 “Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will understand.” This is what is happening in our lives.

1 Peter 1:6-7 ⁶“In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

The trying of spiritual gold to refine and perfect it is so much more important than physical gold. We have to be able to see beyond our present trials to the wonderful product which is being produced from them!

So we have looked at the way God compares the character of His people to spiritual gold, and it certainly is a very fitting analogy, because physical gold has several important characteristics that we need to develop spiritually:

- ✚ Physical gold is beautiful, and that's how our character should be.
- ✚ Gold is stable and enduring, and so should our character be.
- ✚ Gold reflects light, and so should we spiritually reflect the light of God's Word and Way in our example to those around us.
- ✚ Gold is malleable and ductile, and so should we be absolutely yielded to God and workable in His hands.
- ✚ Gold is scarce and difficult to obtain. Similarly, true spiritual character is valuable and precious.
- ✚ Gold is purified by heat, and so our character is made perfect by the furnace of affliction, the trials we go through in life, which give extra depth, strength, endurance and purity to our character.

Is that the type of character we are developing? If so, God gives us a promise, in Malachi 3:16-17: ¹⁶“Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honoured His name. ¹⁷“On the day when I act,” says the LORD Almighty, “they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him.”

The time is coming when God will make up some jewels. He will put together some gold and silver, some rubies and some diamonds, some opals and some onyx—spiritual jewels! His saints and chosen people, who all have different talents and abilities, will be like spiritual gemstones to Him, and He will put them together and they will rule with Him in His Kingdom.

After Jesus returns and sets up the Kingdom “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea”. At that time God’s Spirit will be poured out on all flesh, anyone who wants it, and the people of the world will all be involved in developing righteous character. There will be lots of spiritual gold around then—it will be readily available to all. And we’ll be right there teaching and leading in the process! Because we will have already built that character of gold and be precious jewels in God’s sight—spirit beings, the very bride of Jesus Christ.

And then the New Jerusalem will come down to earth. Notice how it is described:

Revelation 21:15-21 ¹⁵ The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. ¹⁶ The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. ¹⁷ The angel measured the wall using human measurement, and it was 144 cubits thick. ¹⁸ The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. ¹⁹ The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, ²⁰ the fifth onyx, the sixth ruby, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth turquoise, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. ²¹ The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of gold, as pure as transparent glass.

As Rod Matthews mentioned in his message I read out last weekend: “At the culmination of God’s great plan for human beings, the Holy City, as it comes to earth to where we are, is described as being made of and decked with pure gold. It’s God using the best of our world to describe His—where we will all dwell in perfect harmony.”

So that’s why I said I know where El Dorado is. El Dorado, the city of gold, is the New Jerusalem! In fact the New Jerusalem is millions of times more valuable than El Dorado, because it will be a city of spiritual gold!! Everyone who lives there will have the character of pure spiritual gold. El Dorado has nothing on that!

What a marvellous future to look forward to! Let’s be sure we prepare for that future by yielding to God as in us He refines and purifies us to develop in us His precious character of spiritual gold!