

Are You Hugging the Cactus?

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On October 14, 2011, the 25th Annual American Cinematheque Award Ceremony was held in the Beverly Hills Hilton Hotel in Beverly Hills, CA, to honor the actor, Robert Downey, Jr. During the event, Mel Gibson was invited onstage to present Downey with the prestigious award.

Mel Gibson spoke kindly of the star, whom he famously helped to make a comeback by paying Downey Jr.'s insurance bond so he could star in 2003's *The Singing Detective*.

During Robert Downey, Jr.'s acceptance speech, he had kind words for Gibson.

"I asked Mel to present this award for me for a reason. When I couldn't get sober, he told me not to give up hope and encouraged me to find my faith. It didn't have to be his or anyone else's as long as it was rooted in forgiveness. And I couldn't get hired, so he cast me in the lead of a movie that was actually developed for him. He kept a roof over my head and food on the table and most importantly he said if I accepted responsibility for my wrongdoing and embraced that part of my soul that was ugly — hugging the cactus he calls it — he said that if I hugged the cactus long enough, I'd become a man of some humility, and that my life would take on a new meaning. I did and it worked."

With these words echoing in his head, Robert Downey, Jr. turned his life around, stopped drinking, addressed his inner ugly self, stopped doing the harmful actions he was committing, and stopped his downward spiral into self-destruction. A few years later, he was cast in a leading role in the biggest movie franchise in history – playing the role of Iron Man and Tony Stark in the "Avengers" movie series. And the rest is history.

This turnaround was achieved by his diligence, by his commitment, his willingness to face and address the ugly, private, hidden part of himself, and by his belief in and the help of a higher loving spiritual power.

We all have a dark side, an inner, private, even secret part of our lives that no one else knows about. In this private part of our lives, we constantly deal with the secret sins of our lives, the weaknesses of our lives, the repetitive sins of our lives. The incredible pain and suffering we have secretly carry for years and even decades from either actions that we've committed on ourselves and others, or actions by others committed against us.

We are now observing the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and today is the Sabbath during that Feast. Fifty days from tomorrow, we will be celebrating another Feast of our Heavenly Father, Pentecost. For the days and weeks leading up to the Feast of Unleavened Bread, we have been busy physically de-leavening our homes, cars, and

possessions. We have also been busy spiritually de-leavening our inner selves of the sins that beset us in our lives.

1 Corinthians 5:6 *Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?*

7) Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us:

8) Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.
(KJV)

The Greek word for *malice* in verse 8 is “κακία” *kakía* – Strong's #2549 and means “underlying wickedness, inherent evil which is present even if not outwardly expressed, hidden sins.” The Greek word for *wickedness* is “πονηρία” *poneria* – Strong's #4189 and means “iniquity, evil, wickedness.” We explored in my last sermon that our adversary, the devil, is (*ho ponerós* – the evil one), which is the adjective form of the noun *poneria* -- *wickedness*.

So, the Apostle Paul is exhorting us to keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread without the spiritual leaven of our underlying inner sins which are present in us even if not outwardly expressed. These are the sins that we keep hidden from others. These are the sins that we secretly and privately fight and struggle against each and every day.

My sermon this afternoon is entitled:

“Are You Hugging the Cactus?”

I would like to explore more in depth the putting out of our lives the deep, dark sins of our lives, the ugly private side of our lives, and probably the side that no one else knows about, except for our Heavenly Father, His Son, His holy angels, the twenty-four elders before His throne, our adversary, the devil, and his fallen angels. So, in truth, brethren, nothing we do is actually done in private. The Apostle Paul addresses our inner struggles against our sins, including the inner secret sins which beset us all. None of us, including Paul, are immune to this constant struggle for the battle of our mind and character.

Romans 7:14 *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

15) For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.

16) If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.

17) Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

18) For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not.

19) For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do.

20) Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

21) *I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.*
22) *For I delight in the law of God after the inward man:*
23) *But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.*
24) *O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?*
25) *I thank God [ὁ Θεὸς – ho theos – the God – God Our Father] through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin. (KJV)*

In these scriptures, the Apostle Paul encapsulates the daily inner struggles in which we all have to bring our minds into subjection to our Heavenly Father and His laws. Some of these daily struggles include the sins that we have been dealing with for years maybe even decades, and are still trying to overcome them. Some of these seemingly never-ending sins include secret inner sins that we hide from others.

In today's sermon I want to explore in four points, how to deal with these seemingly never-ending secret inner sins in our lives.

The first point in dealing with these secret sins is:

1) We must face our secret inner sins head-on and overcome them.

We all have secret inner sins that we must address and overcome in our lives.

Moses states that our Heavenly Father sees our secret sins. We are not fooling Him when we "brush them under the rug" instead of addressing them head-on, dealing with them, conquering them, and eliminating them.

Psalm 90:8 *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance. (KJV)*

In Psalm 44 the psalmist further shows that God Our Father sees all that we do and think, even the hidden things in our lives.

Psalm 44:20 *If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god;*
21) *Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart. (KJV)*

Our Heavenly Father sees and knows everything that we do. Nothing is hidden from Him, not even our secret, personal sins that we can hide from everyone else. Our hidden, secret sins can result in us living a hypocritical life, outwardly appearing righteous and good, while not addressing the uncomfortable part of our inner sinful self.

Luke 12:1 *In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trod one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.*

2) *For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known.*

3) *Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. (KJV)*

Hidden sins compound the hypocrisy in our lives. Jesus admonished the scribes and Pharisees concerning their hypocrisy in their lives with their outward righteous appearance and their inner, secret, personal, and continual wickedness.

Matthew 23:25 *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.*

26) *Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also.*

27) *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.*

28) *Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. (KJV)*

Brethren, are we hypocritical like the scribes and Pharisees? Do we show an outward righteous façade while we inwardly are not addressing the secret sins of our lives? How do we face and overcome our secret sins head-on? In James 4, the Apostle James exhorts us to resist the devil.

James 4:7 *Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. (KJV)*

This truth is a key in overcoming our secret inner sins. We must take a stand against our sins. We must not give in to temptation. We must avoid situations, places, and environments which our adversary uses to tempt us to sin once again against our Heavenly Father. We must resist our adversary, the devil, the slanderer of our Father's called-out ones.

For example, if a person has a problem and weakness with alcohol, that person should stay away from places that serve alcohol such as bars and taverns. What does that person have to gain by repeatedly walking past the entrance of a bar, peering in, smelling the familiar smells and hearing the familiar sounds coming from the bar, struggling mentally, emotionally, and physically from entering the bar? Why would the person put himself in that position? In that distress? In that temptation? The easy answer is to not be in that location walking back and forth in front of the bar. It's easy and simple to say that about another person's problems, situations, and actions.

But what about ourselves and our problems, situations, and actions? All we have to do is replace the alcohol and the bar with whatever secret sin we have and the environment in which we repeatedly commit that sin. The answer in all the cases is to

avoid the environment and the situation completely. We must humbly ask our Heavenly Father for wisdom, for strength and power, and for the desire to quit putting ourselves in environments and situations in which we will fail and instead to replace the old sinful way with a new righteous path. David understood that he had secret sins which had to be eliminated and cleansed from his life.

Psalm 19:12 *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. (KJV)*

Have we asked God Our Father to cleanse us of our secret faults? Do we confess those sins to Him? Do we truly have the desire to overcome those sins?

Now back to 1 Corinthians 5 and a key in overcoming sins. There is no vacuum. When something is eliminated, something else has to take its place. There is no vacuum and there is no neutral in our spiritual lives.

1 Corinthians 5:8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth. (KJV)

The Greek word for *sincerity* means “clearness and purity” and the Greek word for *truth* means “moral truth”.

So, the Apostle Paul shows this key in verse 8. Paul exhorts us to replace the spiritual leavening of *malice* (that underlying hidden sin besetting us) and *wickedness* (the evil influence by our adversary, the devil) with the unleavened bread of clearness and purity, not clouded and tainted with the dirtiness of sin, and replaced with the unleavened bread of moral truth.

In Proverbs 28 we read an important truth concerning confessing our secret sins to our Heavenly Father and turning from them. This is from the New Living Translation.

Proverbs 28:13 *People who conceal their sins will not prosper, but if they confess and turn from them, they will receive mercy. (NLT)*

So, if we confess our sins to our Father and turn from them and cease doing them, we will receive mercy from our Heavenly Father. The Apostle John discusses the crucial and all-important relationship between God Our Father, Jesus the Anointed One, and us.

1 John 1:7 *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.
8) If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.
9) If we confess our sins, he [God Our Father] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.
10) If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. (KJV)*

There is no sin that we commit that our Heavenly Father will not forgive if we confess our sins and ask for His forgiveness in humility and reverence. So, we must face our secret inner sins head-on and overcome them.

The second point in dealing with these secret sins in our lives is:

2) **Our adversary will tempt us in our weaknesses.**

The history of successful warfare has been the strategy of finding the weakest point of an enemy's defenses and concentrating the armed forces to take advantage of that weakest point. After World War I, the French government built the Maginot Line, which was a 280-mile-long line of fortifications including dozens of fortresses, underground bunkers, minefields, and gun batteries. The Maginot Line was fortified with reinforced concrete and 55 million tons of steel embedded deep into the earth. It was designed to withstand heavy artillery fire, poison gas and whatever else the Germans could throw against it in any future war. The Maginot Line was impervious to most forms of attack. The French felt confident, protected, and secure. However, this massive and long fortification had a weak link. Since the Ardennes Forest was so thick and so forbidding at the south end of the Maginot Line, the French considered it impenetrable by an army. So, the French ended the Maginot Line at the north end of the Ardennes Forest.

In World War II, the German army in a surprise move and strategy totally bypassed the Maginot Line by invading France through the Ardennes Forest, and in doing so, the Germans easily defeated the French forces, and France fell to the Germans in just a few weeks. Consequently, although France had very formidable defenses in the Maginot Line, the Ardennes Forest was the weak point in the French defenses, and the German army capitalized on that weakness.

History is full of other examples, such as the fall of the Babylonian Empire to the Medo-Persian armies when their armies redirected the Euphrates River and walked into the city on the riverbed, under the gates, and conquered the empire in one night. Another example is the fall of Troy by the Greek armies, when their armies sent in the Trojan Horse into the city with a small army of Greek soldiers inside. The list goes on and on. Each example shows an enemy army finding and exploiting the weakest point in the other army's defenses.

The same is true with our spiritual enemy, our adversary, the devil.

2 Corinthians 2:11 *Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.* (KJV)

As we explored in my last sermon, the Greek word for "Satan" in the verse is "ὁ σατανᾶς" *ho satanás*, which is a transliteration (the phonetic sounding of the word in another language instead of translating its meaning) of the Hebrew "שָׂטָן" (*hasatán* – the adversary). A better translation of this verse from what the Greek is saying is given in the New Living Translation.

2 Corinthians 2:11 *So that Satan [ho satanás – the adversary] will not outsmart us. For we are familiar with his evil schemes. (NLT)*

The Apostle Paul is warning us not be outsmarted by our adversary, the devil, who continually is scheming against us to tempt us to fail and to keep us from fulfilling our destiny to enter our Heavenly Father's Kingdom. He will always tempt us in our weaknesses and in the weak point in our defenses.

The temptation of Jesus is a great example of our adversary applying his schemes with temptations. Jesus had just finished 40 days of fasting and consequently was very hungry and very weak. The adversary, the devil, approached Him to tempt Him.

Matthew 4:1 *Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil.*

2) *And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungry.*

3) *And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. (KJV)*

The adversary tempted Jesus with the very condition that He was in. Jesus was hungry, very hungry, after fasting for 40 days. First of all, the adversary tempted Jesus with the sin of pride by questioning that He could be the Son of Yehovah. He then tempted Jesus to turn the stones into bread so that He could eat. What was the reply from Jesus?

Matthew 4:4 *But he answered and said, it is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. [Jesus quoted scripture to combat the adversary – Deuteronomy 8:3]*

5) *Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple,*

6) *And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. (KJV)*

Again, the adversary tempted Jesus with the sin of pride by questioning that He could be the Son of Yehovah. He then tempted Jesus to deliberately fall down from the top of the temple in order to make the Father save Him from a premature death. What was the reply from Jesus?

Matthew 4:7 *Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. [Jesus again quoted scripture to combat the adversary – Deuteronomy 6:16 – the Hebrew word for “tempt” means “to put to the test” – So it would be a sin to deliberately and capriciously put our Heavenly Father to the test – Jesus did not fall for the adversary's schemes]*

8) *Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them;*

9) *And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. (KJV)*

The adversary then tempted Jesus with physical riches, honor, power and the glory of this world by showing Him all the wealth and all the glory of all the worldly kingdoms of the earth saying that He could have them all if He would just worship the adversary. What was the reply from Jesus?

Matthew 4:10 *Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. [Again, Jesus quoted scripture – Deuteronomy 6:13 & 14]*

11) *Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him. (KJV)*

The story of **Matthew 4** is the fulfillment of **James 4:7**. Jesus resisted the devil, and the devil fled from Him and the same is true with us. Even in our weakness, if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. But we cannot successfully resist the devil on our own, especially in our points of weakness. However, we have access to a power that is infinitely more powerful than the power of our adversary, the devil, which leads us to the third point.

The third point in dealing with these secret sins in our lives is:

3) **Our Heavenly Father strengthens us in our weakness.**

Brethren, we cannot overcome our sins on our own by our own power. It just does not work. The Apostle Paul had endured so many trials and sufferings during his ministry. He summed up his reactions to these many sufferings with one memorable phrase. He discusses an apparent contradiction.

2 Corinthians 12:10 *Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong. (KJV)*

The patriarchs of old were also strengthened in their weakness.

Hebrews 11:32 *And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthah; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:*

33) *Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,*

34) *Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. (KJV)*

How can we be made strong when we are weak? This apparent contradiction is made possible only through the power of our Heavenly Father's Holy Spirit.

2 Timothy 1:7 *For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. (KJV)*

So, we have power from our Heavenly Father through His Holy Spirit that He gives to us. In our weakness, we can be made strong by His Spirit. David discussed that his strength came from Yehovah, who is our Heavenly Father.

Psalm 18:1 *I will love thee, O LORD, my strength.*
2) *The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my temptation of Jesus high tower. (KJV)*

David continues this discussion on his strength coming from God Our Father in Psalm 19.

Psalm 19:14 *Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD, my strength, and my redeemer. (KJV)*

In Ephesians 3 Paul further discusses this strength by our Heavenly Father's Holy Spirit within us.

Ephesians 3:14 *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,*
15) *Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,*
16) *That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; (KJV)*

So, we know that our strength is from the Holy Spirit from our Heavenly Father Who is within the inner man. But we must have the desire to overcome the sins of our weaknesses. Do we truly desire to overcome the sins that beset us? Or do we slip and fall each time that the opportunity presents itself for us not to sin? Do we pray diligently for the Father's power to fight our natural urges to sin, even our secret sins? This desire to overcome and the changing of failure into success in overcoming those sins which beset us brings us to the fourth and final point. The fourth point in dealing with these secret sins is.

4) True repentance is the key.

There is much confusion in the religious world concerning what repentance is. For most of Christianity, repentance is feeling sorry for what you have done. So, what is repentance? To answer that question, let's first explore what repentance is not.

A) Repentance is not feeling sorry for our sins.

Again, for the grand majority of Christianity, repentance is feeling sorry for the sins that we have done. Now, feeling sorry for the sins that we have committed against others and against our Heavenly Father is important and is crucial and is the basis for overcoming our sins, but that in itself and by itself is not repentance. Most of the people

in prison today are sorry for the crimes they have committed (or they may be sorry for having been caught and convicted), but many of those people in prisons, if released, would commit the same crime soon after being released. In English, we confuse “feeling sorry” with repenting because of the King James Version translation of many verses.

In Job 42 we read a famous verse after Yehovah spoke to Job.

Job 42:6 *Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes. (KJV)*

The Hebrew word for *repent* is “נָחַם” (*nakhám* – Strong’s #5162. Its meaning is “to be sorry, console oneself.” So, Job told Yehovah that he despised himself in dust and ashes and was sorry for what he had said.

Before the Flood, mankind had become very violent and had totally rejected the way of Yehovah, our Heavenly Father.

Genesis 6:6 *And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. (KJV)*

The Hebrew verb for *repented* in verse 6 is “*nakhám*”, so verse 6 is actually saying that

“Yehovah felt sorry that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him in His heart.”

A similar verb to the Hebrew verb *nakhám* is the Greek verb “*λυπέω*” (*lupéo* – Strong’s #3076 – to distress, to grieve, to make sorrowful).

In 2 Corinthians 2 the Apostle Paul was writing his second letter to the Corinthians congregation, after he had written his first letter to them admonishing them strongly concerning the sins that they were permitting in their midst.

2 Corinthians 2:1 *But I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.*

2) For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me? (KJV)

The Greek verb for *sorry* in verse 2 is *lupéo* and means “to distress, to grieve, to make sorrowful”.

A young rich man approached Jesus and asked Him what he needed to do to receive eternal life. After telling the young man to keep the commandments, Jesus, as a test, also added that he should give away his riches and follow Him.

Matthew 19:21 *Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.*

22) But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions. (KJV)

Again, the word *sorrowful* in verse 22 is a form of the Greek work “lupéo”. But brethren, feeling sorrowful and feeling sorry is not repentance. The Hebrew verb “nakhám” and the Greek verb “lupéo” do not connote repentance. Then, what is repentance?

B) Repentance is the actual change that comes from thinking differently.

In Luke 13 Jesus told the multitude that they needed to repent by telling them two famous local stories that were known very well by the multitude.

Luke 13:1 *There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.*

2) And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things?

3) I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

4) Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem?

5) I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. (KJV)

The Greek verb translated as *repent* in the New Testament is “μετανοέω” (metanoéo – Strong’s #3340 – a combination of two Greek words literally meaning “to think differently afterwards”). So, repentance is not an emotional experience that is so often reflected in religious events, movies, and messages. The desire to repent is an emotional response not to want to continue to sin, which is hugely important. But repentance is not that desire. Repentance is the actual change. It is the actual change in thinking. It is the actual change in behavior. It is the actual change in the response to the same temptation or stimulus than before. On the day of Pentecost in 31 A.D., the Jews in Jerusalem who heard Peter’s sermon responded to his message in a positive way.

Acts 2:37 *Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?*

38) Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. (KJV)

We see in verse 37 that the men were pricked in their hearts. They were sorrowful. They were humbled. They wanted to make things right. But that wasn’t repentance. Verse 38 shows that, because Peter, when he saw their sorrow, announced that they should repent (they should think differently from now on) and be baptized. Repentance is the action of making the change in our lives.

In his defense before King Agrippa in Caesarea, the Apostle Paul told him about his conversion.

Acts 26:20 *But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. (KJV)*

The verb *repent* in this verse is *etanoéo* meaning “to think differently afterwards.” The Greek noun for *repentance* in this verse is similar to the Greek verb and is *metanoia* meaning “a change of mind, change in the inner man”.

So verse 20 could be read

“That they should think differently and turn to the God [God Our Father] and do works meet for the change in the inner man.

This is exactly what true repentance is all about – the change in the inner man.

The Hebrew word closely approximating the Greek verb *metanoéo* is *shub* – Strong's #7725 which means “to turn back, to turn away, to return”.

In 2 Chronicles 7:14 we read a very well-known verse which has this Hebrew verb concerning a deep desire of our Heavenly Father.

2 Chronicles 7:14 *If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. (KJV)*

The Hebrew verb for *turn* is *shub* meaning “to turn back”. God Our Father’s desire was that Israel would turn and think differently and act differently and that they would obey Him.

In Deuteronomy 30 from the Young’s Literal Translation, is the renewing of the covenant with Israel before they entered the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 30:1-2 *And it hath been, when all these things come upon thee, the blessing and the reviling, which I have set before thee, and thou hast brought them back unto thy heart, among all the nations whither Jehovah thy God hath driven thee away,
2) and hast turned back unto Jehovah thy God, and hearkened to His voice, according to all that I am commanding thee to-day, thou and thy sons, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul.*

Continuing in verse 8

8) And thou dost turn back, and hast hearkened to the voice of Jehovah, and hast done all His commands which I am commanding thee to-day. (YLT)

In verse 2 and verse 8, the verb *turn back* is again the Hebrew verb *shub*. Yehovah is telling the Israelites that they had changed and turned back to Him to obey Him. They had changed their thinking and had changed their heart. So true repentance is the actual change in our lives and to not respond to the same temptation or stimulus by sinning like we have before. We must be wanting and desiring to change. We must be desiring not to sin, but instead to obey our Heavenly Father and His laws. That desire

leads to a conviction and commitment to overcome our sins. That change in thinking and behavior is true repentance.

John the Baptist proclaimed a very important concept concerning repentance in a short verse. It involves action and commitment.

Matthew 3:8 *Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance:* (KJV)

The Greek word for *meet* means “comparable or worthy”. So, John is saying that we should bring forth actions and change in behavior comparable for repentance. Are we doing that? Are we committed to overcoming our sins, even the secret hidden sins which beset us? When will we take a stand against the adversary and resist him steadfastly so that there is a different outcome. Instead of failure and sin, we now have victory over that specific sin, so that it does not have power over us anymore. That victory over sin is the fruit of repentance, and that is why true repentance is the key for overcoming our secret sins.

In today’s sermon, we have explored the concept of “hugging the cactus”, that is, addressing of the ugly, hidden part of our lives, the secret part of our lives which no one else sees, the parts of our lives which are difficult and even painful to address but which must be addressed. We explored “hugging the cactus” through four points.

1) We must face our secret inner sins head-on and overcome them.

We must address our secret sins and faults. We must have the desire and the commitment to do the uncomfortable tasks of addressing the ugliest inner parts of ourselves. We must not be hypocritical like the scribes and Pharisees who were clean and righteous in outward appearance but were unclean in their inner selves. We must take a stand, and choose to resist our adversary, the devil. We must replace the inner sins in our lives with the spiritual unleavened bread of purity and truth. Our Heavenly Father and His Son, Jesus, will help us in this struggle.

2) Our adversary will tempt us in our weaknesses.

Our adversary, the devil, hates us and wants us to fail and for us not to enter our Father’s Kingdom. He will attack us and will tempt us in our weaknesses, not in our strengths. We should always be cognizant and watchful of our adversary’s schemes. If we resist the adversary, he will flee from us. God Our Father and Jesus the Anointed One are infinitely more powerful than the adversary.

3) Our Heavenly Father strengthens us in our weakness.

With the power that God Our Father gives to us through His Spirit, we can be strong even though we are weak. Like all the patriarchs and believers before us, out of weakness we can be made strong. God Our Father has not given us a spirit of fear, but He has given us His Spirit of power. We must have trust in our Heavenly Father that He truly is the source of our strength and power in overcoming all our weaknesses and sins.

4) True repentance is the key.

Repentance is not feeling sorry for what we have done. Repentance is not asking for forgiveness from our Father for what we have done. True repentance is the successful result of changing our minds, changing our actions, changing our behavior, and changing our character to be in line and in agreement with our Heavenly Father. This is the end result of truly overcoming sin.

During these Spring Holy Days, let's renew our efforts to "hug the cactus", and address those sins that we have not stopped. Let's renew our efforts not to just cover up and cover over the sins that beset us, maybe sins that we just seem to not be able to overcome, sins that we still continue to commit years, even decades, after our baptism.

We can and should feel sorry for those sins, and we can and should come before our Heavenly Father on our knees asking for forgiveness by the blood of Jesus the Anointed One again and again for the sins that we commit. But we must overcome those sins and the overcoming of those sins and the changing of our character and behavior are the true repentance that our Heavenly Father is desiring and expecting from each of us.

We must address and ultimately stop and overcome all of our sins, even the deep dark sins of our lives. This only comes with our deep desire and commitment to stop sinning, and our using the power of the Holy Spirit to stop sinning and have the success of true repentance.

Brethren, are you "hugging the cactus"?