

Identification Repentance in New Covenant Theology: A Balanced Theological and Pastoral Appraisal

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Cite this article in APA

Sinclair, G., & Sinclair, Y. (2025). Identification repentance in new covenant theology: A balanced theological and pastoral appraisal. *Journal of pastoral and practical theology*, 4(1), 58-69. <https://doi.org/10.51317/jppt.v4i1.783>



A publication of Editon Consortium Publishing (online)

Article history

Received: 2025-06-27

Accepted: 2025-07-26

Published: 2025-08-27

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Abstract

This article assesses Identification Repentance (IR) within New Covenant theology. Identification Repentance (IR) refers to repenting for the sins of a group with which one identifies. It has gained popularity in intercessory contexts. However, its theological validity within New Covenant theology is questionable. While Old Testament figures like Nehemiah and Daniel model communal confession, these acts lack the personal transformation central to New Testament repentance. This study uses a doctrinal definition (Webster, 2005), biblical-theological analysis (Vos, 2003), thematic evaluation (Grenz & Olson, 1996), and a balanced appraisal (Grenz & Olson, 1996) to assess IR's theological coherence. Scripture is allowed to shape doctrine, tracing IR across redemptive history and evaluating its compatibility in the New Covenant context. IR lacks biblical, patristic, and liturgical support. Key texts (e.g., Nehemiah 1; Daniel 9) demonstrate Identification Confession (IC), but not repentance. The New Covenant emphasises personal accountability, emotional integrity, and spiritual rebirth. IR risks undermining the believer's new identity in Christ and runs the risk of confusing intercession with repentance. IR should not be normative in the Church. Ministers should promote authentic, Spirit-led repentance, distinguish IR from IC, and emphasise the believer's identity in Christ. Lament and intercession are valid expressions of pastoral solidarity, but must not replace personal repentance.

Key terms: Generational sin, identification confession, identification repentance, sin.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Identification Repentance (IR), the practice of confessing and repenting for the sins of a community or nation with which one identifies, has gained traction in contemporary intercessory gatherings. Advocates often appeal to biblical precedents such as Nehemiah (Neh. 1:4-11) and Daniel (Dan. 9:4-19), presenting IR as a means of corporate solidarity and spiritual renewal. Yet, despite its appeal, IR remains theologically underdeveloped within the framework of New Covenant theology. This lack of clarity raises important questions about its legitimacy and application in Christian practice, particularly in light of the gospel's emphasis on Christ's once-for-all atonement and the believer's union with Him.

To frame this discussion, several key terms require clarification. Sin is any thought, word, or deed that does not proceed from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for "whatever does not proceed from faith is sin" (Romans 14:23). Generational sin refers to recurring patterns of sin or their consequences, transmitted through familial or cultural lines. Conviction is a gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, whereby He communicates divine displeasure toward sin while simultaneously affirming His steadfast love for the sinner (John 16:8; Psalm 103:8-12). Confession constitutes a verbal or non-verbal expression of contrition in response to sin. At the same time, repentance is a Spirit-initiated, personal turning from sin toward God, marked by conviction, confession, and lasting transformation (2 Timothy 2:25-26). Intercession refers to prayer offered on behalf of others, typically seeking divine mercy, healing, or intervention (Romans 8:26-27; James 5:16). Identification, in this context, refers to the notion of feeling a connection with an individual, group, community or nation. Identification Repentance (IR) denotes the act of repenting for the sins of a group, community, or nation with which one feels connected, whether by heritage, participation, or solidarity. Proxy Repentance (PR) is the act of repenting for sin on behalf of another, a group, community, or nation, and is therefore integral to IR. Identification Confession (IC) refers to confessing the sins of another, group, community or nation. Finally, pastoral care is grounded in the teaching of Jesus and the call to love and care for the physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being of others.

This article investigates the theological and pastoral questions surrounding IR by offering a balanced appraisal. We explore IR under the New Covenant, finding it unfounded theologically. The New Testament stresses personal accountability, spiritual rebirth, and a new identity in Christ, challenging PR. IC shows solidarity and lament, but is not repentance. Genuine repentance is Spirit-led, personal, flowing from the heart and is transformational. The Church should seek authentic holiness through grace and union with Christ, not proxy repentance.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Contemporary Advocates of IR

This literature review critically evaluates six sources that impact our understanding of IR. The goal is to compare and contrast their methodologies and implications in relation to IR. Greig (2001) presents a systematic theological approach to IR. He is biblically grounded; however, his argument appears to confuse Old and New Covenant environments. His opening use of 2 Chronicles 7:14 is a case in point. He uses this verse to assert that the Church should be repenting on behalf of whichever geopolitical system with which that part of the body identifies. In this verse (2 Chronicles 7:14), 'land' under the old covenant refers to Israel, while under the New Covenant, it refers to heaven (2 Corinthians 5:17, Philippians 3:20, Galatians 4:26). However, how could earthly repentance influence heavenly realities, even if it were needed or possible? Thus, Greig's (2001) conclusions are brought into question. Stark (2023) presents a prophetic

theology that calls the new wave of prophets to wash the Bride of Christ with His word. Like Greig (2001), her thesis is also biblically grounded. It impacts IR because it calls for unity and an end to the geopoliticisation of the Bride of Christ. Her plea is urgent, passionate and compelling. Stark's stance negates a key tenet of Greig's argument.

The Bride of Christ is a citizen of heaven, her King is Christ, and her loyalty is to Him alone; she is in the world, but not of the world. Without Greig's foundational assumption of the possibility of geopoliticisation of a part or whole of the Bride of Christ, his conclusion is brought into question. Lastly, Solberg (2025) offers an exegetical theology of Galatians. His treatise is built on a strong biblical foundation and argues that under the new covenant, those who are in Christ are new creations, fully liberated from any bond. This too directly challenges Greig's (2001) assumptions, as proxy repentance requires an assumption of a continuation of our previous lives into our new life in Christ (generational sin).

Foster (2012) is a devotional, theological approach to prayer. It incorporates some biblical backing, but is a pastoral appeal aimed at inviting its audience into a deeper relationship with Jesus. His argument for PR rests on two extra-biblical sources. He quotes from Bonhoeffer (2025), a passage about the persecuted Christian entering into the suffering of Christ. This citation appears to be taken out of context, as Bonhoeffer's (2025) whole thesis is a seminal work against 'cheap grace' (the presentation of the Gospel of Christ without the requirement for personal repentance). Foster (2012) also quotes The Ravensbrück Prayer (Santillan, 2024) in support of PR. Although this is a beautiful, heart-rending prayer for the forgiveness of great sin, it neither discusses nor provides substantiation for PR.

In a comparable manner to Foster (2012) and Sayers' (2019) devotional, theological approach to personal renewal appears to misquote Schlink (1969). The section Sayers (2019) quotes from is about personal repentance leading to great joy. Schlink (1969) examined in Chapter 4, PR for the sins of the geopolitical nation where the Christian lives; however, as previously discussed, for those who are in Christ, heaven is their nation and Christ their King (John 17:16, Philippians 3:20, Isaiah 33:22, 1 Timothy 6:14-16). Thus, this is also not applicable in the New Covenant context.

In summary, Greig (2001) presents a rigorous, systematic theology for IR, but two of his base assumptions do not appear to be applicable in the New Covenant context, when rigorously examined by Stark (2023) and Solberg (2025), undermining his whole thesis. Both Foster (2012) and Sayers (2019) devotional theological approaches lack credible substantiation.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The doctrinal definition aligns with Webster (2005) on doctrinal formulation, a humble method where the theologian listens to Scripture instead of imposing control. Following Webster (2005), it allows Scripture to shape the theologian's discourse. This approach was used to define IR by closely attending to the biblical text and permitting its witness to guide doctrinal conclusions.

The biblical-theological analysis traces a theological trajectory through the progressive unfolding of God's self-revelation in Scripture, as delineated by Vos (2003), situating Identification Repentance within the development of redemptive history across both Old and New Testament writings. This requires a coherent arc of Scripture, which we define as encapsulated in the divine declaration: "It is not good for man to be

alone; I will make him a suitable helper" (Genesis 2:18). This creational motif reverberates throughout Scripture, pointing beyond the first Adam to the eschatological fulfilment in Christ, the True Adam. This motif was followed through Scripture to examine if IR can be framed within the new covenantal context.

In the thematic evaluation, we engage with what Hays (2004) identifies as the "synthetic task", namely, the framing of theological concerns within the broader canonical context. These themes were then analysed comparatively to assess their coherence and relevance to IR.

The balanced appraisal aligns with what Grenz and Olson (1996) advocate, emphasising the need to actively engage with theological issues in a manner that is both intellectually thorough and spiritually mindful. Through weighing of the arguments, IR is evaluated to determine its doctrinal value.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Doctrinal Definition

In defining IR, it is essential to allow Scripture to shape the doctrine rather than imposing expectations upon the text. Nehemiah 1:4-11 is often cited as a model example of IR. Yet a close reading reveals a striking feature: while the passage is rich in confession, mourning, and covenantal appeal, it lacks an explicit act, declaration, or expression of repentance.

Nehemiah weeps, fasts, and confesses the sins of Israel, including those of his household. He acknowledges covenantal failure and appeals to God's mercy and promises. However, the prayer does not include a turning from sin, a commitment to new obedience, or a plea for transformation, elements typically associated with repentance in both Old and New Testament theology.

This observation challenges Identification Repentance. Nehemiah's prayer exemplifies Identification Confession, with his expression of solidarity with the sins of his community, through lament and intercession, but not through personal or corporate transformation. This pattern is further demonstrated in Daniel 9:4-19, one of the two principal scriptural examples of IR, alongside Nehemiah 1:4-11. These two passages are frequently cited as foundational to the doctrine. Yet, both share a striking and often overlooked feature: while they show confession, lament, and covenantal appeal, they lack any explicit act of repentance. Daniel even cries that despite the calamity, "we have not made our prayer before the Lord our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth" (Daniel 9:13). This absence of repentance reinforces the emerging doctrinal insight that IR, as modelled in Scripture, is not synonymous with repentance. Instead, IR is a distinct theological act, confessional, covenantal, and intercessory, which functions as a precursor to repentance and is thus better articulated as Identification Confession (IC).

Ezra (Ezra 9:5-15) continues the biblical pattern of IC, wherein he assumes responsibility for the sins of the covenant community through intercessory lament and penitential prayer. His posture exemplifies IC rather than IR, as his engagement remains within the bounds of confessional solidarity without advancing toward the profound covenantal renewal or substitutionary identification characteristic of IR.

In Exodus 32:30-34, Moses confesses Israel's sin and offers himself as a potential recipient of their judgment, seeking to mediate a reduced sentence through assumed identification. His intercessory plea, "blot me out of your book", reveals his willingness to bear the consequences of their transgression.

Nevertheless, this act, while deeply sacrificial, remains distinct from genuine repentance, which entails an individual's moral and covenantal turning from sin. God's response, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book" (Exodus 32:33), is theologically illuminating, as it affirms individual accountability and explicitly repudiates the notion that guilt may be transferred or absolved through mere identification. Even within the Old Testament economy, divine justice maintains the principle that each person is answerable for their sin, thereby negating the theological acceptance of IR.

Moses again intercedes on behalf of Israel in Numbers 14:13-26, pleading for divine forgiveness in light of their rebellion. However, neither Moses nor Israel makes any expression of repentance. While God grants a measure of pardon, sparing the nation from immediate destruction, the narrative underscores a critical theological principle: those who sin are subject to divine judgment. This passage, like Exodus 32, reinforces the distinction between IC and IR.

The experience of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 14:7-9, 20-22) presents an even more sobering theological moment. Here, the prophet engages in Identification Confession, pleading with God on behalf of Israel, acknowledging their collective guilt. This passage, often cited in support of IR, may in fact function as a counter-text. God's response is striking; He explicitly forbids Jeremiah from continuing his intercession, "Do not pray for this people, for their good." (Jeremiah 14:11b). It underscores the limits of mediated confession and the ineffectiveness of IR. Far from endorsing IR, the text affirms divine justice and the principle that intercession cannot override personal responsibility for sin and the need for a personal saviour.

The examples from Jeremiah and Moses present a marked contrast to the prophet Jonah (Jonah), who neither identified with nor showed concern for the people of Nineveh. In reluctant obedience, Jonah proclaimed to them God's message of imminent destruction. Remarkably, the entire city, from the least to the greatest, including the king, responded with individual repentance and a change of conduct (Jonah 3:5), prompting divine mercy and deliverance. When considering these three witnesses, the overarching theme of personal responsibility and individual repentance stands in opposition to the concept of IR.

Proponents of IR have included Jesus' work on the cross in their narrative. The mission of the Lord Jesus Christ, particularly His substitutionary death and the great exchange at the cross, is utterly unique, irreplaceable, and unrepeatable. As such, it does not form part of the narrative analysis undertaken in this study. While Christ's atoning work involves His identification with sinners, it transcends the category of IR by accomplishing actual atonement through divine agency. To confuse Christ's redemptive act with IR risks diminishing the singularity of His mediatorial office. Therefore, this study maintains a clear methodological boundary, excluding Christ's substitutionary work from the scope of IR analysis.

Paul's lament in Romans 9:1-5 reveals a deep anguish over unbelieving Israel's estrangement from the Kingdom of God. Yet, despite his intense concern, the passage contains no act of confession, no articulation of repentance, and no attempt to assume their guilt. Paul's grief is pastoral but not penitential in the mode of IR. This text, often cited in support of IR, upon closer inspection, appears to undermine its theological premise. Paul does not seek to mediate or remotely repent on behalf of Israel; instead, he affirms their accountability and mourns their unbelief. Thus, Romans 9:1-5 may serve more appropriately

as a caution against overextending the IR model into apostolic contexts where it is neither practised nor prescribed.

The preceding doctrinal exploration has sought to clarify the contours of IR by attending closely to the biblical text and resisting the imposition of systematic categories. Through a careful examination of key Old Testament passages, a consistent pattern emerges: acts of intercessory confession and covenantal lament are present, yet repentance is absent. This distinction between IC and IR is not merely exegetical but theological. As we now turn to a broader biblical-theological analysis, the aim is to situate IR within the redemptive-historical framework of Scripture, tracing its development, limitations, and theological significance across the canon, and discerning its place within New Covenant theology and pastoral praxis.

Biblical-Theological Analysis

The doctrine of IR gestures toward covenantal solidarity and communal responsibility; however, its biblical grounding is tenuous. The arc of Scripture (as defined above) consistently affirms personal accountability before God, even within corporate contexts. Figures such as Moses, Jeremiah, and Paul express deep identification with their communities, yet their intercessions are met with divine responses that reinforce individual responsibility (Exod. 32:33; Jeremiah 14:11; Romans 9:7).

The biblical narrative emphasises divine-human relationships and personal accountability for redemption. IC appears as a pastoral impulse in some Old Testament texts. IR's theological ambiguity and lack of creedal foundation suggest it should not be normative church practice.

Thematic Evaluation

The scriptural arc affirms God's desire for renewal of individuals, relational restoration and covenantal fidelity. We now turn to three theological concerns that emerge from this tension: the compatibility of IR with the believer's new identity in Christ; the necessity of emotional connection for authentic repentance; and the role of bloodline in validating such repentance.

The Compatibility of IR with the Believer's New Identity in Christ

Paul's rhetorical questions, "What fellowship has light with darkness? What agreement has Christ with Belial?" underscore a fundamental theological conviction: those who are in Christ are no longer bound by covenantal or ethical ties to the world or its prince (2 Corinthians 6:14-15). For Paul, the Kingdom of God and the dominion of the world are categorically distinct and irreconcilable. This sharp dualism raises a critical question for the doctrine of IR: if the ecclesia is called out from the world and into union with Christ, how can it rightly identify with the world in its sin and rebellion? Such identification appears to blur the very boundaries that Paul insists must remain clear.

The Church Fathers appear to affirm the emphasis on personal responsibility in repentance. For instance, Augustinus' (2025) treatment of confession remains firmly rooted in the individual's moral and spiritual agency. There is no indication in this passage that confession operates remotely or by proxy; rather, it is the personal acknowledgement of wrongdoing that initiates the path toward righteousness.

Corporate confession remains a vital element in many liturgical traditions, reflecting the communal nature of worship and the shared acknowledgement of sin within the body of Christ. These practices align with

scriptural exhortations such as “confess your sins to one another” (James 5:16), emphasising mutual accountability and humility. However, even within these corporate expressions, there is no theological indication that one individual is repenting on behalf of another. The act of confession, though communal in setting, retains its fundamentally personal character, reinforcing the view that repentance is an individual response to divine conviction.

Taken together, the witness of Scripture, the theological reflections of the Church Fathers, and the liturgical practices of the historic Church consistently affirm the personal and ecclesial distinctiveness of those who are in Christ. The New Testament draws a sharp boundary between the Church and the world, calling believers out of darkness and into the light of Christ. The Church Fathers, while acknowledging the communal dimensions of sin, uniformly emphasise personal moral agency in repentance, without endorsing proxy confession for the sins of the unbelieving world. Likewise, liturgical traditions, though rich in corporate expressions of penitence, maintain the integrity of individual responsibility before God. Thus, there is no theological warrant, biblical, patristic, or liturgical, for the identification of believers with the world in its rebellion. To do so would risk undermining the very nature of the Church as a called-out people, holy unto the Lord.

The Necessity of Emotional Connection for Authentic Repentance

While both theological and liturgical traditions affirm the personal nature of repentance, Scripture goes further, insisting that true repentance is not merely verbal or procedural; it is deeply emotional and volitional, rooted in the heart. The Lord’s exhortation through the prophet Joel, “Rend your heart and not your garments” (Joel 2:13), makes clear that outward expressions of contrition are insufficient without genuine inward sorrow. This principle poses a significant challenge to any model of IR that lacks authentic emotional engagement with the sin being confessed. For repentance to be spiritually valid, it must arise from a heart grieved by the offence, not merely aligned with it by proxy. As 1 Samuel 16:7 reminds us, God does not look at outward appearances but at the heart. Therefore, any act of representative confession must be evaluated in light of the sincerity and spiritual integrity of the one repenting. Without emotional identification, such repentance risks becoming performative rather than transformative. This concern fits naturally within the arc of Scripture we have traced: God is seeking a bride who loves His Son, not one who merely recites the correct liturgical formula on Sunday.

Unsurprisingly, the Church Fathers echo Scripture’s unambiguous stance on the nature of repentance. Chrysostom (2025) is an impassioned and personal call to personal repentance. The absence of any notion of proxy or representative repentance in his exposition reinforces the biblical emphasis on inward transformation over outward form.

Lastly, as previously noted, liturgical practice affirms this position. While corporate confession is a regular and meaningful feature of many worship traditions, it consistently reflects the shared posture of individual penitents before God, rather than any notion of proxy repentance. The liturgy invites communal participation, but it does not substitute one person’s contrition for another’s. This reinforces the scriptural and patristic consensus that authentic repentance must arise from the heart of the one who has sinned.

In summation, the unified witness of Scripture, the Church Fathers, and the liturgical tradition confirms that true repentance is a matter of a person’s heart, not merely of words. Whether expressed individually or

corporately, repentance must arise from genuine sorrow and spiritual conviction. Without heartfelt contrition, even the most eloquent confession remains hollow. This consensus reinforces the theological imperative that repentance is not performative but transformative.

The Role of Bloodline in Validating Such Repentance

The Old Testament affirms the reality of generational consequences for sin, as seen in texts such as Exodus 20:5 and Deuteronomy 5:9, where God declares, "I will visit the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation." These passages reflect the communal and covenantal nature of Israel's relationship with God, where familial and tribal identity carried spiritual and ethical implications. The concept of generational sin is thus woven into the fabric of Israel's covenantal consciousness. However, the New Covenant introduces a decisive shift. In Christ, believers are made new creations, "the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17), and now belong to the family of God (Romans 8:16-17, 1 John 3:1-2). Thus, we are no longer defined by ancestral guilt or spiritual inheritance. Paul's theology consistently emphasises individual accountability and spiritual rebirth, severing the ties to former identities rooted in the flesh or the world. This raises a critical question for IR: if the believer's identity is now in Christ, what theological basis remains for repenting on behalf of generational sin? While the effects of past sins may linger socially or psychologically, the New Covenant reorients the believer's posture from inherited guilt to personal transformation. Again, this coheres with our arc of Scripture: the Church is now the body of Christ, holy and suitable for her husband, a bride defined by covenantal love and spiritual union, not by inherited sin.

Thematic Evaluation - Summation

The Church Fathers and liturgical tradition, though shaped by the Old Testament's awareness of generational sin, ultimately affirm the New Covenant's emphasis on personal transformation and spiritual rebirth. Patristic writings consistently underscore the necessity of individual contrition and moral agency, rather than inherited guilt. Likewise, liturgical expressions of repentance, while communal in form, reflect the gathered body of believers, each responding personally to divine grace. In this way, both the Fathers and the liturgy uphold the believer's new identity in Christ: an identity no longer defined by ancestral sin, but by union with the risen Lord. This coherence between Scripture, tradition, and worship reinforces the theological trajectory we have traced, one in which the Church, as the bride of Christ, is called to holiness through love, individual confession and repentance, and personal renewal.

Balanced Appraisal

Each concern has been addressed from biblical and theological perspectives, balancing critical and affirmative views.

Identification and the New Creation in Christ

Theological Concern: Can believers, as new creations in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17), meaningfully identify with the sins of others, particularly those outside the redeemed community?

Affirmative Position

Christian Concern: Jesus calls His followers to love as they have been loved, embodying the gospel in both word and deed. Central to this calling is empathy for the sinner, a posture that reflects Jesus' compassion for the lost. The Christian life, therefore, is not marked by detachment from the world's

brokenness, but by a redemptive engagement with it. Empathy does not require identification with guilt, but it does require a heart moved by grace, willing to intercede, proclaim, and serve.

Critical Position

Biblical Precedent: Figures such as Daniel (Daniel 9:4-19), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4-11), and Ezra (Ezra 9:5-15) offer compelling examples of confessing sin on behalf of Israel. These acts were deeply covenantal and ethnic, rooted in their identity within the Old Covenant community. However, while these examples support the practice of IC within the Old Testament framework, they do not validate IR application under the New Covenant.

Ontological Discontinuity: The New Covenant introduces a radical ontological shift in the believer's identity. To be a "new creation in Christ" (2 Corinthians 5:17) implies a decisive break from former identities, including those shaped by ancestral, ethnic, or covenantal guilt. This transformation is not merely moral or behavioural but ontological: the believer is spiritually reborn, incorporated into the body of Christ, and no longer defined by the patterns or affiliations of the old life. Consequently, the theological basis for identifying with the sins of others, particularly those outside the redeemed community, becomes increasingly tenuous. IR, if it presumes continuity with pre-conversion identities, risks undermining the very nature of New Covenant regeneration and ecclesial holiness.

New Covenant Individualism: The New Covenant marks a decisive shift from corporate accountability to personal responsibility and regeneration. Texts such as Jeremiah 31:29-34 and Ezekiel 18:20 reject the notion that children bear the guilt of their parents, affirming instead that "each will die for their sin." This principle is echoed in Hebrews 8:10, where God promises to write His law on individuals' hearts, and in Romans 14:12, which declares that "each of us will give an account of ourselves to God." Together, these passages establish a theological framework in which moral agency and spiritual transformation are deeply personal. Within this context, the practice of IR appears to conflict with the New Covenant's emphasis on individual accountability and the believer's new identity in Christ.

Absence of Biblical, Patristic, and Liturgical Precedent: The apostles preached repentance and called individuals to turn to God, but they did not model or teach proxy repentance. Patristic writings and liturgical traditions, while shaped by Old Testament awareness of communal sin, consistently affirm the personal nature of repentance. This absence of precedent across Scripture, tradition, and worship raises serious theological questions about the legitimacy of IR within the New Covenant framework.

Emotional Connection as a Prerequisite for Authentic Repentance

Theological Concern: Is IR valid if the individual lacks an emotional connection to the group being represented?

Affirmative Position

Faith over Feeling: Biblical obedience is not contingent upon emotional resonance. Throughout Scripture, prophets and faithful servants of God often acted in obedience despite personal cost, emotional detachment, or lack of immediate understanding. Hosea, for example, was commanded to marry Gomer as a prophetic sign, a deeply costly and emotionally complex act (Hosea 1:2-3). His obedience was not driven by emotional identification but by submission to God's will. This principle suggests that emotional

connection, while valuable, is not a prerequisite for faithful action. Thus, proponents of IR may argue that obedience to a divine call to confess, even without emotional solidarity, can still be valid. However, this must be carefully weighed against the New Covenant emphasis on sincerity of heart and spiritual integrity.

Critical Position

Authenticity and Integrity: Repentance, by its nature, demands sincerity and spiritual integrity. Jesus warns against outward religious acts devoid of inner authenticity: “Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them” (Matthew 6:1-5). This principle challenges any form of IR that lacks emotional or spiritual engagement with the sin being confessed. Without authentic grief or moral solidarity, such acts may reflect ritual compliance rather than transformative repentance, undermining both personal integrity and theological coherence.

Cultural Appropriation: Assuming the voice of another group without shared experience, history, or relational connection may be perceived as presumptuous or even exploitative. In contexts where cultural, ethnic, or historical wounds are still tender, acts of representative confession, especially by those outside the affected community, risk reinforcing power imbalances or trivialising lived experiences. IR, if not rooted in genuine relational solidarity and humility, may unintentionally mirror patterns of appropriation rather than reconciliation. This concern invites careful pastoral discernment, ensuring that any act of intercession or confession honours the dignity and agency of the community being represented.

Pastoral Confusion: Acts of IR may generate uncertainty or discomfort among congregants, particularly when such practices appear disconnected from lived experience. Without clear theological grounding or emotional authenticity, these acts risk being perceived as symbolic gestures rather than sincere expressions of repentance. This can lead to confusion about their purpose, efficacy, and spiritual integrity. Pastoral leaders must therefore exercise discernment, ensuring that any corporate confession is clearly explained, theologically coherent, and pastorally sensitive, so that it edifies rather than unsettles the gathered community.

Identification with Perpetrators, by Bloodline

Theological Concern: Must one be connected to the perpetrators of sin, through bloodline, for IR to be valid and not merely symbolic?

Affirmative Position

Biblical Pattern: The Old Testament provides clear examples of covenantal leaders, Ezra (Ezra 9:5-15), Nehemiah (Nehemiah 1:4-11), and Daniel (Daniel 9:4-19), confessing the sins of their ancestors and interceding on behalf of Israel. These acts were rooted in bloodline identification and covenantal solidarity, reflecting the communal nature of Israel’s relationship with God under the Mosaic covenant. Their prayers demonstrate that, within the Old Covenant framework, representative confession was both valid and spiritually significant. However, this pattern must be carefully contextualised. These examples affirm the practice within a covenantal and ethnic context. Still, they do not automatically translate into New Covenant theology, where believers are defined not by ancestry but by union with Christ. Thus, while the Old Testament supports IC within its framework, IR’s application in the New Covenant requires theological re-evaluation.

Moral Responsibility: Participation in or benefit from historically unjust structures, such as colonialism or systemic racism, may carry with it a moral imperative to acknowledge inherited privilege and confession of one's indirect complicity. This responsibility arises not merely from personal actions but from a recognition of one's embeddedness within broader communal narratives of injustice. However, within the New Covenant framework, moral responsibility is reoriented around personal repentance and the transformative work of Christ. While believers may acknowledge inherited privilege or systemic injustice, the New Covenant does not mandate corporate repentance for ancestral or communal sins in the same juridical or covenantal sense. Instead, it calls for personal holiness, justice, and reconciliation as expressions of the gospel's ethical demands.

Critical Position

New Covenant Kinship Redefined: Under the New Covenant, the Church is a spiritual family, transcending biological, ethnic, and national boundaries (Matthew 12:50). Kinship is no longer grounded in genealogical descent or tribal affiliation but in union with Christ and participation in the body of believers. This redefinition challenges the Old Testament model of corporate identity and confession, shifting the locus of covenantal responsibility from ethnic solidarity to spiritual communion.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study finds that IR is theologically untenable in both Old and New Testament contexts. Identification Confession can express pastoral solidarity and lament, but should not be confused with true repentance. Genuine repentance is a Spirit-led conviction of personal sin, resulting in contrition, turning to God, restoration of the relationship with Him and transformation of character.

Recommendations by Pastoral Themes

The Emotional Integrity of Repentance

Ministers are called not merely to facilitate ritual observance but to shepherd congregants toward authentic contrition, a repentance that engages both heart and mind.

The Limits of Proxy Repentance

Spiritual leaders must discern between intercession, confession and repentance. Intercession is pleading on behalf of others; confession requires acknowledgement and contrition in response to sin; repentance is a personal turning towards God marked by conviction, confession and transformation. Leaders should ensure communal confession does not hide individual accountability. True repentance requires personal conviction, not just collective liturgy.

The New Identity in Christ

The New Covenant teaching that centres on grace, regeneration, and the believer's new identity in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 3:13) will help to encourage and develop strong believers.

The Role of Lament and Intercession

In response to societal and ecclesial brokenness, leaders may encourage practices of lament and intercession as faithful expressions of grief, solidarity, and hope. However, it is essential to distinguish them from repentance.

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