

A Biblical Case for Spirit-Prompted Corporate Repentance.

Corporate repentance is an act of unified prayer by the people of God, confessing sins of family, church, or nation, that have been revealed by Spirit. Through the years, the people of Salem Alliance Church have found themselves engaged in corporate repentance at various gatherings and solemn assemblies as a response to Spirit's conviction. We engage in corporate repentance to remove the aspects of our lives that grieve God. Prayers of this nature are brought to the surface by Spirit to remove roadblocks that would keep greater levels of unity, blessings, revival, and the peace of Christ from being realized.

The recent days have led us to engage in topics of racial equity and social justice leading some to ask: is corporate repentance a biblical concept that we as a church have a responsibility to engage in? This paper is an attempt to theologically defend the importance and practice of corporate repentance in our churches today and show that it is a biblical concept to be engaged in, found in both the Old and New Testaments.

Old Testament Examples

In the Old Testament, confession of sin was both personal and collective. There are examples of individuals being led to repent for actions they themselves had not engaged in. Ezra confessed the sin of the nation of Israel. Daniel repented for his own sin, and the sins of all Israel. Nehemiah's personal and corporate repentance led to revival. These passages in the OT explicitly teach that responsibility for sin rests on those who have committed those sins ([Deuteronomy 24:16](#)). While individuals are not culpable for the sins of their parents, grandparents, the church, our nation ([Ezekiel 18:20](#)), the corruptive results of those sins are corporate. We are affected by the sins of others and from other generations.

New Testament Examples

We see corporate repentance in the NT. The church in Ephesus modeled corporate repentance as the community brought expensive books used for incantations and burned them publicly denouncing the sorcery they had adopted. ([Acts 19:18-19](#)). One could argue that Zacchaeus's act of repentance, while individual, brought with it a collective blessing. Similar to the priestly duty seen in the OT, Zacchaeus's repentance affected the corporate household. The actionable turning from sin and paying people back has a collective impact on his entire family. Undoubtedly the decision had a financial impact on them all. As a result of this repentance, Jesus declared that salvation came to this entire house.

The Old Testament concept of generational sin also continues in the New Testament. Paul and Peter both addressed the concept of corporate guilt. ([Mt 23:31-32](#), [Acts 3:13-15](#), [1 Thes. 2:14-16](#)). The NT concept of repentance is shaped and based on an understanding of the OT forms of repentance. Again, it is our individual recognition and repentance of sin that opens the door to a relational restoration with Christ as Savior, but it is important to note the collective nature of not only the framework NT repentance is built upon, but also the collective aspect with which it is taught. ([Mt 6:13](#), [1 Jn 1:9](#))

The gospel in itself is a collective message. It was through Adam that sin entered the world and was imputed to all. ([Rom 5:12](#)) While this is a collective concept some struggle with, the good news is that likewise, through one man, Christ, righteousness was purchased and made available to all. ([1 Cor 15:21](#))

Corporate repentance is not only seen in the NT, it is given as a remedy by Jesus to the Seven Churches of Revelation, specifically, the churches of Pergamum, Thyatira, and Sardis ([Rev 2-3](#)). They are confronted with sins that some of the group have brought into the community, and as a result, all the members of these congregations are corrupted by these sins.

If we see corporate repentance in the NT and it is recommended by Christ himself, is it not beneficial for us to confess the sins of our community so that we do not unknowingly walk in those sins? Even if we ourselves didn't commit the sin, we can always identify with the roots of those sins.

Repentance in Community

Applied to the topic of racial equity and social justice, repentance must precede repair and reconciliation. The wound that is being overlooked will fester and come to the surface again when repentance is left out. While we may have not knowingly acted with hate and racism against African Americans or other groups, we can identify with the underlying root of racism, whether that be pride, self-preservation, fear or control. Taking from the example of the prophet Jeremiah, who was not an idolater himself, but who led his people in corporate repentance due to the idolatry that had been embraced by some, may we also repent and ask for forgiveness in community.

Corporate repentance, if authentic, is costly and demands lament, modeled in the narratives of Nehemiah and Daniel. Following humble confession and realization of the awe-struck forgiveness through Christ, repentance continues with the renewing of mind and change of action. ([Luke 3:8-14](#), [Acts 26:20](#))

The effects of sin from the past still carry influence on us today. Generational sins are passed through families. Sins of the past have caused systems to be built that are still not equitable. Spiritual strongholds have crept in that keep us from aligning with God's fatherly heart for us. As a result, we must move forward as a collective community being open to Spirit's gentle conviction. Corporate repentance is an act that we should engage in.

May we respond when prompted, individually and corporately, turning with no condemnation, but with a regret, empathy and lament that causes us to change our ways, fix inequitable systems and make declarations to match the heart of our God and Savior.

For an example of the power of corporate repentance, read this testimony from a sister Alliance church in Philly that embraced Corporate Repentance: <https://www.cmalliance.org/news/2020/09/29/repentance-responsibility-and-reconciliation/?fbclid=IwAR0JGXW-VZoXeLPuJLFjgamISPfpqoHtAvry0d3lia9rn9h7av10gCwpTHo>