



NEW COVENANT FELLOWSHIP

BEING | BECOMING | DOING

NCF VISION REFRESH
2022 THEME: THE FUTURE IS CHRIST

Dear Church Family,

I have spent much time lately contemplating upon the scriptures, praying for each of you, and dreaming about what our next year(s) might bring. As I have prayed and considered these things, I have felt the need to answer the following question in long form, both for myself and for your sake. Why do we emphasize being, becoming, and doing? This question is critical for our church and for our future together. In this letter I will do my best to hash out what I see as God's vision for New Covenant Fellowship (and really His church as a whole) so that each of us can have a fuller understanding of who we are and where the Spirit is taking us. At the last day everyone will finally know that the future is Christ.¹ It is my hope that we will all redirect our present lives in such a way that when we reach that future, we will already be in sync with it.

From day one, God had a master plan for humanity. He created us for his glory.² His desire for us was that we would walk alongside him, ruling and reigning over the world and much more together with him. His design for us was to be a people who were at rest in him and who worked from that rest. This is the true natural state of humanity. Adam and Eve made a particular and intentional choice to diverge from God's life for them shaped by his grace, truth, and love.³ Instead they opted to forge a different path in their own striving through human strength and might divorced from

¹ Philippians 2:9-11, Revelation 21:22-27

² Isaiah 43:1-7, Romans 11:36, 1 Corinthians 10:31

³ 2 Corinthians 11:3

God.⁴ Rather than truth and love they chose falsehood from the demonic realm and self-centeredness. They rejected work from rest in favor of work from restlessness. Ever since this time human nature has been corrupted.⁵ We now live in a false state of nature modeled by Adam, lead by Satan and his cohorts, restless, and living for self rather than from sacrificial love.⁶

Christ entered into our world to bring the remedy to the brokenness of the human condition which we brought upon ourselves. He himself is the remedy.⁷ Right in the midst of this topsy-turvy, restless, unsettled, devil dominated, and corrupted world, Christ lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father.⁸ He was perpetually at rest in the Father, lead by the Spirit, full of truth, and overflowing with sacrificial love. He was the exact opposite of what people are like in Adam. The brokenness and shattered dreams which line Adam's path are clear signs of impending doom, gloom, and death.⁹ The wholeness, light, rest, and joy we see in Christ's path are a clear sign of impending life, redemption, and restoration of what has been broken.¹⁰

Christ became the remedy to human brokenness by his life, death, burial, and resurrection. First he lived the life full of obedience, rest, grace, truth, and love which God intended for Adam and all of us, but which we failed to live. Second he died the

⁴ Genesis 2-3, Ecclesiastes 7:29

⁵ Ephesians 2:3

⁶ Romans 1:24-32

⁷ Isaiah 53, 59:15-17, 2 Corinthians 5:21

⁸ John 5:19

⁹ Romans 5

¹⁰ Philippians 1:27-30, Romans 6

physical and spiritual death¹¹ which naturally follows every life lived in Adam's path.¹² This consisted of immense torture on the cross, but even greater torture as he endured God's wrath in our place.¹³ The physical brutality of the cross was extensive and gross, but even it does not do justice to how great the spiritual brutality was that Christ faced as he took the natural consequences for sin upon himself. This worked towards our freedom because he, being righteous, elected to take our penalty for us.¹⁴ Through burial and resurrection Christ finally and firmly defeated death and all of the effects of sin, boldly displaying the reality of all sad things coming untrue in him.

We emphasize being, becoming, and doing because each of these represents a part of the process by which we learn to live a new life in Christ and leave the old life in Adam behind.¹⁵ Because Christ has won freedom from sin and death for us, we are now free to be at rest in the Father just as we were designed to be. In Genesis 2 we see that God rested from the work of creation, but he did not stop working altogether. He continues to hold the world together,¹⁶ to work within the world he made, and to walk with people who will walk with him. His rest is an example for us. In Christ we rest from our striving to make something of ourselves.¹⁷ We are learning to be in Christ and to believe that what he says about us is what is truest about us. We then work from the

¹¹ To clarify, I mean spiritual death in the sense of being forsaken by the Father, not in the sense of ceasing to exist spiritually.

¹² Romans 5:12-14

¹³ Psalm 22, Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34

¹⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:21

¹⁵ Romans 6

¹⁶ Colossians 1:16-17

¹⁷ Hebrews 4

closed system of his grace, not needing (or able) to add a single shred of value to ourselves.¹⁸

God's ultimate aim for us is to glorify him by joining him in his work in the world. This work is to make much of Jesus. We do this by proclaiming the gospel message to all and walking specifically alongside those who commit to be disciples of Christ through repentance and belief in the gospel.¹⁹ We cannot join Christ in his work with purity unless we are being in him and becoming like him. Learning to be in Christ prepares us for doing the work of Christ. We must learn that we cannot add value to ourselves in God's kingdom by working for God.²⁰ That is the old way of thinking in Adam. If we try to live the Christ-centered life by Adam's means we will burn out and likely take others with us. We can only do Christ's work from his grace. Ultimately it is God who calls us to be in Christ, and who also completes the work of becoming like Christ in us.²¹ This is what we mean when we say, "by grace." This grace is the empowering and qualifying work of God.²² Learning to live and do out of our identity in Christ is a process and that is the becoming piece. It is Christ's will, that you and I become mature in him.²³ We were not designed to remain Children in the faith forever, but to grow up as we learn to live in our new identity as sons and daughters of the Father.²⁴ Becoming requires regular time with Christ and with the community of Christ.

¹⁸ Ephesians 2:1-10

¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:12-21

²⁰ Galatians 3

²¹ Philippians 1:6

²² Colossians 1:9-14

²³ Colossians 1:28, Ephesians 4:13

²⁴ Ephesians 1:5

It is both a communal and individualistic process simultaneously. The Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ through his word, sacraments, disciplines, and his community in the local church. We grow to become like Christ as we are taught in community, as we learn to serve others in community, and as we are served by others in community. Community also becomes an important guidepost for us, caring for us and making sure we remain steadily upon Christ's path rather than Adam's.

If we want to do the work of Christ in the world, we cannot skip the process God has set up for us. We absolutely must commit ourselves to daily spiritual life. We must practice being at rest in Christ because we want to work from rest rather than working for rest like Adam's world. They crash and burn because they work to prove themselves and they can never be quite enough. We are already enough in Christ but in our broken human nature we have a hard time believing this. Dedicating ourselves to spiritual practices and to Biblical community moves us along the path towards becoming like Christ. By doing this, we prioritize the priorities of God's kingdom in our lives just as Christ has called us to do.²⁵ Becoming is all about leaning to live within the context and framework of our new identity which we have in him. This is the work for which the church is designed. We carry the message of Christ into every place in which we go, and we teach everyone who will listen to follow everything that Christ has taught us to do.²⁶ It is when our concept of being (who we are) is aligned with Christ that we can truly do his work, properly balanced and at rest in God.

We emphasize being in Christ, becoming like Christ, and doing the work of Christ in that order. It is our desire that our church be properly balanced. Along these lines,

²⁵ Matthew 6:33

²⁶ Matthew 28:16-20, Ephesians 4:10-16

we are careful and intentional about our church calendar and activities. It is important that we leave room for the Holy Spirit to work, for our church members to rest in Christ, and for families to grow and minister together in the community. In our human nature we are prone to make life about the work we do rather than to make our work about the life we have in Christ. We want everything we do to be an overflow of who we are in Christ. He is our ultimate sabbath rest.

There are two specific imbalances regarding our work which we must avoid. First is the temptation to define ourselves based on what we do rather than who we are. This is a working to establish an identity in and for ourselves. Most people in American culture today trend towards being imbalanced in this way. We work for approval from others and when we don't perform up to ours or others' standards, we feel anxious and/or upset. This often leads to trying even harder until we eventually burn out or alienate those we care about. Christians can fall into this pattern regarding our lives and our religion when we try to do those things in Adam's pattern rather than Christ's. We are prone to viewing ourselves as self-made regarding our material lives and achievements. It is a short jump for us to apply this same logic to our spiritual lives. The second imbalance is living from a wrong or false identity. We find ourselves working to prove that we belong in our culture. Some fall into patterns of virtue signaling (putting our morality on display) in order to prove their worthiness to society. Many change or denounce previously held beliefs and/or adjust behavioral patterns in personally (and culturally) destructive ways. Very often it comes with a public announcement about what has been changed in order to fit in. In the church, we may work hard to check all the boxes we need to check so that God and others will accept

us. We may feel the need to put our religious acts on display. This mindset always leads to burnout because we can never be enough. In our own strength we can never attain to Christlikeness and in the world we can never fully measure up to their standards. Cultural standards are always changing. A feminist by one day's standards is a bigot and a misogynist by the next day's standards.

The solution to these imbalances is to live from our identity in Christ. If we are at rest in Christ, we are stable because he is stable. We can be okay with the fact that we are still a work in progress. We can work with Christ without burning out because we know that he is enough and we are enough in him. He is at work in us, shaping us by grace into the people he made us to be. The future is Christ. It is our desire to be a people firmly rooted in Christ so that we will be ready for that coming future. NCF is a church dedicated to learning to be at rest in Christ so that we can join Christ in his work of redeeming and restoring this world. We cannot skip the process of being and becoming if we are to do Christ's work well. This letter is intended to describe what we hope to become together. It is my confidence in the Lord that leads me to believe that we will attain to these things through Christ.

May His grace and peace abound in us as we dedicate ourselves to being at rest in Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Nick Tarter", written in a cursive style.

Pastor Nick Tarter, 04/19/2022