THE “WHOSOEVER WILL” PRESBYTERIANS
(John 3:14-18)

INTRODUCTION

Today is officially “Denomination Sunday.” Why is the first Sunday in February is designated “Denomination Sunday?” Because it was on February 4, 1810 that three Presbyterian ministers met in one of their homes (a log cabin) in Dickson County TN to pray for God’s leading in reconstituting the Presbytery named “Cumberland” of the Presbyterian Church so that they could ordain ministers to preach the Gospel on the frontier. When they felt that this was God’s will, they proceeded to form a Presbytery, God blessed them, many ministers joined with them, and the church grew rapidly on the frontier of early 1800s and became a denomination.

So our denomination is 207 years old. The name “Cumberland” comes from the name of the former Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church by that name. That name came from the fact that the churches were located in the geographical area called ‘Cumberland Country.” Now you have the story.

What were the issues that caused these early ministers to pray and proceed as they did? Well it was during the revival era of the early 1800, called the 2nd Great Awakening. Some Presbyterian ministers in the Cumberland Presbytery were involved in the revival efforts in the south central Kentucky and middle Tennessee area. The main theological issue grew out of these ministers’ conviction to preach the Gospel as a “whosoever will” gospel. They wanted to emphasize that ‘whosoever will’ may be saved through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Other Presbyterian ministers of that day emphasized the doctrine of predestination and election to the point that it hindered them from being free to offer the Gospel to “whosoever will.” They preached that Jesus came to save only those who had been predestined to salvation. But the ministers in the reconstituted Cumberland Presbytery wanted to preach the gospel as a free offer that whosoever will may come to Christ and believe will be saved.

Eventually “Whosoever will” became one of the identifying motto of Cumberland Presbyterians. Cumberland Presbyterians are the “whosoever will” Presbyterians. If someone were to ask you what is the difference between CP and other Presbyterians, a good answer would be “We are the ‘whosoever will’ Presbyterians.

In my visiting other churches in the area when we first moved to Sunbright we visited Covenant Presbyterian Church here in Oakridge. This is a PCA Church. The pastor called me that afternoon to get better acquainted with me and when I told him I was a CP, he said that he was
familiar with the CPs and referred to us as the “whosoever will” Presbyterians!

He knew who we are but I fear that many CPs may not know that this is one of our distinctions

SCRIPTURAL BASIS FOR “WHOSOEVER WILL”

Where in the Scriptures do we get this phrase “Whosoever Will”? The verse that most clearly has it is Revelation 22:17 in the KJV.

Rev 22:17 KJV And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The invitation to drink of the water of life freely is given to “whosoever will.”

But the verse that is central to the ‘whosoever will’ gospel is John 3:16. In the KJV version it reads:

Joh 3:16 KJV For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

We, as CPs, have put that verse in the Introduction to our Confession of Faith as being central to our theology. It reads:

“’This [John 3:16] is the gospel in miniature.’ .... It is the statement of the purpose of this confession of faith and its organizing principle.”

Obviously we are not the only church that has John 3:16 as the heart of our faith, but we are the first Presbyterian denomination to state it as so.

Today the question is not whether you are Cumberland Presbyterian, but are you a “Whosoever Will” Christian. What does it mean to be a “Whosoever Will” Christian? It is one who believes John 3:16 as the heart of God’s message to us.

WE ARE TO LOVE THE WORLD AS GOD LOVES THE WORLD

First, a “Whosoever Will” Christian will love the world as God loves the world. John 3:16 begins, “God so loved the world...”
We are so accustomed to this teaching that God loves the world that we don't realize how radical it was in Jesus' day. The average Jewish person in Jesus' day thought that God only loved Israel. We don’t realize how radical it is today either.

Today, the Christian faith is the only religion which teaches that God loves the world impartially. Muslims do not teach this, Buddhists do not; Hindus do not, only the Bible teaches that God loves the world in the same way. "Red and yellow, black and white, they are all precious in His sight, Jesus loves the little children of the world. And Jesus loves the ‘big’ children (adults) of the world also. We must love the world as God loves the world.

This is easier said that done! How can we love those who are not like us? It is only if we have experienced God’s love in our hearts. It is only as we ourselves are touch by the love of God as expressed in John 3:16. “We love because He first loved us!” So to be a “Whosoevers Will” Christian must have experienced God’s love in your heart and you want to share that love to others.

**WE WILL BELIEVE THAT JESUS IS GOD’S GIFT TO THE WORLD**

Next, a “Whosoevers Will” Christian will see Jesus as God’s special gift to mankind. The verse continues, “**God so loved the world, that He gave his only begotten Son…**” God puts His love into action through sending and giving His Only Begotten Son for the world to be saved.

The ‘whosoever will’ Gospel focuses on Jesus as the only begotten Son of God who came to save the world.

> I read this week of two new ways of describing the Bible and preaching this week: The Bible is a HIM-book. We don’t preach the plan of salvation, we preach the MAN of salvation. Jesus is the message of the Bible and the message of the Gospel. The ‘whosoever will’ gospel makes Christ central to our message.

What does it mean that God GAVE his only begotten Son. Jesus himself explains what it means.

> **John 3:14-15 NIV** Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15) that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him."

Verses 14 and 15 finishes up Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus and he refers to an event in the OT. (Numbers 21:8,9)
This event in the life of Israel was when they were wandering in the wilderness. They were rebellious against God and Moses. Poisonous snakes came and were killing them, because of their rebellious hearts. The snakes were there as a judgment of God on their sins. But God told Moses to make a pole, put a snake made of bronze on it, and to lift it up before the people. When they looked at the snake and put their faith in God’s promise to heal them they would be healed. Jesus takes this event and draws the spiritual application from it. He said,

Joh 3:14-15 NIV Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, (15) that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life."

God’s act of giving His Son is speaking about Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross. As Moses lifted up the serpent on a pole, the Lord Jesus Christ was lifted up on a cross for our sins. As God’s wrath for the sins of the Israelites was taken by the serpent on the pole, so was God’s wrath for the sins of the world taken up by Christ on the Cross. Faith is a matter of looking to Jesus as the Cure for your sins.

A “Whosoever Will” Christian is one who believes that the Father gave Jesus to take our sins and one who looks to Him for eternal life.

WE ARE TO BELIEVE THAT THERE ARE TWO DESTINIES FOR THE WORLD

Next, a “Whosoever Will” Christian will know that there are only two possible destinies for all mankind; either perishing or eternal life.

Joh 3:16 KJV For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life

A “Whosoever Will” Christian believes that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun. He believes that heaven or eternal life is a gift of God’s grace, but hell or eternal destruction is something we earned by our sins. Jesus makes the promise of eternal life very clear in John 5:24

Joh 5:24 KJV Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.
The “whosoever will” Christian knows that no matter who you are, what your background, what your ethnicity, what you have been taught before, what you have believed before, if you will believe in Jesus you have eternal life. If not, the bad news, is that the wrath of God continues upon you. This perishing is existing for eternity under the wrath of God or outside the blessings and grace of God.

Many people have the idea that a person has to wait until the great Judgment Day before they know God’s verdict on them as to whether they go to heaven or to hell. But this is not the case. The verdict has already given by God. If you believe in Jesus you have the verdict right now. You have eternal life. If you reject the Son, the verdict is already given. You will not see life, but the wrath of God remain on you!

A “Whosoever Will” Christian will be committed to letting people know that there are only two destinies in eternity and you can know which destiny is yours right now! So as choose life as Moses would say like he said to the children of Israel (Deut 19:30)

A “Whosoever Will” Christ will pleasd with people to choose life, to choose Jesus.

CONCLUSION

E. K. Reagin, a well-known CP minister in Knoxville several years ago wrote: “Our doctrine of “whosoever will” makes the presentation of the gospel to all people a matter of great importance.”

In the early days of the CP Church the ‘whosoever will’ gospel propelled the ministers to do all that they could to preach this gospel to all. Many spent many days on horseback going from middle Tennessee to Kentucky, to Arkansas, to Alabama, to Missouri, yes to East Tennessee. They were ‘gospel-driven.’

Again, I am not here today to make you a Cumberland Presbyterian. But I am here today to help you become a “Whosoever Will” Christian. A person who seeks to love the world as God loves the world; a person who has received God’s gift to the world His Son Jesus Christ, who died for your sins; a person who knows that there is a heaven to gain and a hell to shun; and a person who will want to tell “whosoever will” that if they will believe in Christ they will be receiving God’s great love for them.

Do you want to be a “Whosoever Will’ Christian?

Amen? Amen!