Equality under the Lord's Law: The Disciplinary Process in Texas Baptist Churches, 1833-1870

Nick Malavis
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THE DISCIPLINARY PROCESS IN
TEXAS BAPTIST CHURCHES, 1833-1870

by Nick Malavis

The minutes of the First Baptist Church of Houston defined the disciplinary process for members in 1850 as:

No members shall be allowed to prefer a charge against another for personal grievances until he shall have complied with the requirements enjoined in the 18th chapter of Matthew - For any offense of immoral or unchristian conduct a charge may be made by any member on notice thereof given. Such charge or charges shall be made in writing and the members so offending shall be furnished with a copy of them and notified to attend a trial.

Evangelicals took the disciplining of their fellow members seriously, and the matter occupied much of the attention of the regular conference meetings of antebellum Baptist churches. Disciplinary actions were based on Jesus' directives to his disciples as recorded in the Bible [Matt. 18:15-17]. Church records reveal that the preservation of order and maintenance of decency was very important. Members were disciplined for drinking, fighting, stealing, lying, slander, adultery, fornication, dancing, non-attendance, and other behavior deemed to be immoral by evangelicals. Evangelical churches served as moral courts and held all members, black and white, to roughly the same moral standards and obligations. Behind this lay the familial idea that all were equal in God's eyes as members of his spiritual family.¹

As evangelicals, the Baptists sought to avoid the corruption and sin in the world around them and to transform both individuals and society into morally upright Christians. Toward this end evangelicals submitted to a loving discipline. Evangelicals believed that if an individual was left alone, he or she might lapse into sin. Discipline was a means of reminding members, through example, of their duties and obligations. The convert's submission to the "edification, comfort, loving instruction, watchful care, and faithful admonitions of fellow members" promoted the bonds of family and community. "Order" and "discipline" were important concepts in a disorganized frontier society. Failure to perform one's duty led to disorder, which undermined the peace and harmony of the community. Thus, duty and order were key ingredients in the establishment and maintenance of a stable community in a frontier setting. The disciplinary process was not meant to be punitive, but, under the loving and watchful care of fellow members, to serve as a means of guiding erring brethren back on the "right" course.²

An important concept underlying the purpose of church discipline

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was the congregation as a family. Discipline was a ritualistic reminder that there were limits which church members could not cross and still remain true to the congregation. Members were reminded of their importance and the necessity of maintaining their Christian duties to ensure salvation as well as the community's well-being. When one member erred, the entire community was disgraced. Extreme individuality and self-centeredness were intolerable; a church member's behavior affected and reflected upon the whole community. Evangelicals scrutinized each others' conduct with great care and allowed the accused ample opportunity to demonstrate his or her innocence or repentance. The most severe sanction was exclusion from the church, which, in a frontier society, could be a traumatic experience.

In the antebellum Baptist church the congregation was the governing body, and regular business meetings were held at least once a month, usually on a Saturday. Besides a constitution or covenant, each church had rules and regulations for conducting business and for handling discipline problems. These rules and regulations emphasized the necessity of maintaining order. During the meetings, or conferences, as they were often called, no member was allowed to leave without permission. All matters pertaining to church membership were decided by a two-thirds or unanimous vote, while temporal concerns were resolved by a majority vote. The rules also specified how motions were to be made and how often a person could speak. Laughing, talking, and whispering were prohibited. Church members were encouraged to settle their disputes privately.

Evangelicals were often skeptical of secular law and sometimes excluded brethren for seeking redress in the civil courts rather than the church. The aggrieved person was expected to notify the church of his or her complaint, and the accused was cited to appear at the next regular conference. At that time, the accused was expected either to confess and ask for forgiveness or to give satisfactory evidence of his or her innocence. If the accused failed to appear, a committee of two or three persons was appointed to visit the recalcitrant person and persuade him or her to appear at the next conference. In some instances, a trial was conducted. All interested parties, black or white, could testify. If the accused was found guilty, he or she was either reprimanded and forgiven, suspended, or excluded from the church. Once excluded, a person could not join another church of the same denomination without a letter of dismissal in good standing. As the evidence that follows will demonstrate, the process was remarkably democratic, with no apparent race or gender-based discrimination.

Since they were stern disciplinarians and held all persons morally accountable for their own actions, evangelicals could not ignore the moral dilemma confronting Christian slaves who were subject to the control of worldly masters. They were aware of slavery's negative impact on the core of evangelical morality, the family. Thus, Christian masters were expected
to look after the family life and personal condition of their slaves. They also were encouraged to submit slave disciplinary matters to the church. Evangelicals thus imposed mutual duties and obligations upon masters and slaves. They encouraged masters to treat their slaves with moderation, gentleness, and "meekness of wisdom." Evangelicals also admonished slaves to obey their masters and remain industrious, honest, faithful, submissive, and humble. As morally accountable persons, slaves were accorded some recognition of their human status. Black slaves were also most likely satisfied and comforted to know that "ole Massa" was held accountable to a higher authority.

An examination of the disciplinary process in evangelical churches can reveal much about the nature of religious life in the antebellum South. Randy Sparks has taken issue with David T. Bailey's assertion that the number of church disciplinary cases declined in the antebellum South after 1830. Based on a study of evangelical churches in Mississippi during that time, Sparks argued that church disciplinary actions did not decrease. Sparks also maintained that, contrary to Jean E. Friedman's claim, there was no evidence in his sample of Mississippi churches that women were discriminated against in the disciplinary process. If a double standard did exist, Sparks claims that it operated against white males and blacks, who were disciplined in excess of their proportion to the church membership. The purpose of this study is to compare the disciplinary process in Texas Baptist churches to Sparks's analysis of evangelical churches in Mississippi as to the fairness in terms of race and gender.

Prior to Texas's independence from Mexico in 1836, Roman Catholicism was the official religion. However, evangelical Protestants had been preaching in Texas since the beginning of Anglo-American settlement in the 1820s. From the inception of Stephen F. Austin's colony in Matagorda County, religion played an important role in the lives of both black and white settlers. Religious meetings were often held in private homes. Black slaves attended worship services with their masters and became church members. Even though Mexican law prohibited slavery, the American colonists brought their slaves into Texas as "hired" or "leased" servants. After achieving independence in 1836, the Republic of Texas legalized slavery but banned the future importation of slaves from anywhere except the United States. By 1860, black slaves made up one-fourth of the total Texas population of 600,000.

Generally, the Baptists had a sense of responsibility to extend the gospel to the slaves. Prior to Texas independence in 1836, openly organized and cooperative Baptist religious work was frustrated by Mexican law. Joseph L. Bays was believed to be the first Baptist preacher in Texas. A native of Virginia, Bays came to Texas in 1820 by way of Kentucky and Tennessee. In 1823 he was arrested by Mexican authorities for preaching in Austin's colony, but escaped after allegedly clubbing his captors. Bays was followed by other Baptist preachers such as Freeman Smalley and
Thomas J. Pilgrim. The most noted early Texas Baptist was Daniel Parker. He construed the Mexican colonization laws as forbidding only the organization of non-Catholic churches in Texas. Thus, Parker assumed it was legal to organize a Protestant church outside of Texas and then move in. He organized the Pilgrim Church of Predestinarian Baptists in Crawford County, Illinois, on July 26, 1833, with seven white members including himself as pastor. Parker and his congregation arrived in Austin’s colony sometime around January 1834. In the spring of that year, they moved into East Texas. The Pilgrim Baptist Church met in various locations but considered Houston County as its center. The church contained approximately 121 members in 1834, including five blacks. It was generally assumed to have been the first Baptist church in Texas.9

Prior to the American Civil War, black and white Baptists in Texas enjoyed a period of religious integration and cooperation. Blacks were accepted into membership in Baptist churches on a relatively equal basis with whites, although their names were sometimes listed separately or at the bottom of church rolls. Blacks and whites worshipped together in the same building even though a natural but unenforced segregation usually occurred in their seating arrangements. Some blacks were even accorded positions of leadership in preaching and organizing new churches. A certain degree of fraternizing probably was essential in order for blacks and whites to survive in many of the isolated regions of Texas in the 1830s and 1840s. Indian attacks and Mexican raids were imminent under the frontier conditions that prevailed. The young and unstable Texas government could offer little protection or aid. In addition, many Texas plantations and farms were small, and the owners possessed only a few slaves. Often, masters and slaves worked side-by-side. Thus, the isolated frontier conditions in Texas created a situation in which blacks and whites came together for mutual protection and support. This carried over into the churches where, at least in the case of the Baptists, all converts, black and white, were welcomed into fellowship and membership.10

The acceptance of blacks as equal partners in religious matters was illustrated by the ordination of the first known black Baptist minister in Texas. The minutes of the Conference of the Pilgrim Baptist Church, meeting in October 1853, state:

Appointed Brethren Reuben Brown J. Kennedy a committee to Se[e] John Davis and enquire of him if he has any objection for the Church to liberate his Slave Brother qualy to exercise in public if he (the Church) thinks his gift is profitable.

“Slave Brother” Qualy was listed as a church member in 1834. There is no mention of any restrictions on Qualy’s preaching, but there is no record of him ever preaching, so it is impossible to determine if Qualy preached to blacks or whites or both. However, it is noteworthy that the church had to ask Qualy’s owner’s permission to let him preach. The church was still somewhat circumscribed by the civil law and the American notion
of separation of church and state. At the same time, as a minister, Qualy was not above reproach. In November 1859 a committee of two persons was appointed to "Visit Brother Qualy and Enquire into his disorderly conduct." One month later the committee reported and was discharged. There was no record of the details of the committee's report or of the final disposition of Qualy's case.  

Qualy's case suggests the relatively equal standing between blacks and whites in early Texas Baptist churches. Although this equality had some limits, it was nonetheless genuine. Church records are replete with examples of how blacks and whites were treated and judged by the same standard in disciplinary matters. This conclusion rests on the survey of the records of six Texas Baptist churches between the years 1833 and 1870. All six churches had a combined membership, at any one time, of approximately 450 and a total of 222 disciplinary cases over the thirty-seven years. Of the total membership, approximately 40 percent were males and 60 percent were females. Seventy-nine percent were white and 21 percent were black. Thirty-one percent were white males, 48 percent were white females, 8 percent were black males, and 13 percent were black females (see table 1). The overall female-to-male ratio in these congregations matched Donald Mathews's suggestion that there was a 65:35 ratio of women to men in antebellum Southern churches. It also reflected Rhys Isaac's claim that women, more so than men, were attracted to evangelical churches because evangelicals celebrated characteristics traditionally thought of as "feminine," such as non-violence, humility, emotionalism, caring, and domesticity.

TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Members</td>
<td>177</td>
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<tr>
<td>Female Members</td>
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<td>353</td>
<td>79.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Members</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Male Members</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Female Members</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>48.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Male Members</td>
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<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Female Members</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: The above figures are based on the combined membership average at any one time of the six East Texas Baptist churches utilized in this study. They were derived from the largest membership list appearing in the records of the six respective churches between the years 1833 and 1870.

Church records of the six Texas Baptist churches were examined in this case to determine if any significant degree of gender or racial discrimination was reflected in the number and percentage of disciplinary actions against members of both sexes and races. Randy Sparks utilized
this type of methodology in his analysis of disciplinary proceedings in antebellum evangelical churches in Mississippi. Based on the evidence in the various Baptist church records employed in this study, there appear to be both similarities and differences between the lack of sexual or racial discrimination in church disciplinary cases in Texas and Mississippi.

Disciplinary actions for drunkenness (or intoxication) appeared to be common in frontier evangelical churches. Excessive alcohol consumption by frontiersmen was legendary. In Mississippi, intoxication proved to be the most frequent charge in church disciplinary actions involving white males. Evangelicals were concerned about alcohol abuse because of its detrimental effect not only on the individual, but on the family and the community as well. Drinking detracted from the family’s economic well-being and was also linked to disruptive and violent behavior. In Texas Baptist churches, drunkenness likewise made up the highest number and percentage of disciplinary cases against white men. A total of thirty-one intoxication cases made up 20.4 percent of the disciplinary actions against white males in Texas. Some of these cases were also linked to collateral charges of disorder, profanity, or immoral conduct.

An example of the correlation between intoxication and other improper behavior appeared in the case of “Brother” Stephens, who was excluded from the First Baptist Church of Houston in 1849 for drunkenness and gambling. Evangelicals endeavored to guide their wayward sheep back on the proper path. For example, in 1860, John N. Sparks was cited to appear before a church conference to answer to a charge of being drunk. Sparks appeared and admitted his guilt and successfully asked to be forgiven. In another case, “Brother Denson complained against himself for having dishonored the cause of Christ by drinking too much spirits.” He was forgiven after “making the satisfactory acknowledgements.” However, Jonathan Black was excluded from the First Baptist Church of Galveston in 1849 because he had been “impertinent” and claimed that he could not “disgrace himself by making confessions to the Church” to charges of intoxication.

The second largest category of disciplinary actions against white men in Texas involved improper conduct (or disorder). These cases amounted to 19.1 percent (29 cases) of the charges against white males. For example, John Farrow was excommunicated for “grossly immoral conduct, infidelity, and utter disregard for the Sabbath all of which were matters of notoriety.” Whatever Lewis Clark did, he was excluded from the First Baptist Church of Hemphill for “conduct too base to be mentioned in the minutes of the Church.” In 1845, the records for the Pilgrim Baptist Church reflect:

Brother Blanchard came to the Church and acknowledged ... becoming angry at Brother R.S., and acknowledged that he had done wrong. The Church after hearing the whole matter and the acknowledgement of Brother Blanchard says she is satisfied with Brother Blanchard.
Later on, Brother R.S. was excluded from the church for “failing to maintain his family in a comfortable manner.”

In contrast to Mississippi, where dancing was found to rank third in the percentage of disciplinary actions against white males, it was relegated to seventh place in Texas, making up 4 percent (6 cases) against white men. Evangelicals frowned on dancing; they considered it to be unholy, unprofitable, sensual, senseless, barbaric, and devilish. All of the disciplinary cases against white males for dancing in Texas appeared in the Old North Baptist Church of Nacogdoches. In one instance, Brother Putnam was forgiven after acknowledging his guilt for attending a party and dancing and “professing great penitence.” However, Joseph Mayfield was excluded when he failed to appear before the church and give satisfaction to the charge of dancing. James Fulghum was likewise excluded after he failed to make any acknowledgement of or give satisfaction to an accusation of dancing.

Non-attendance of worship services made up the third ranking category of disciplinary actions against white males in Texas: 17.2 percent (26 cases) of the total. Almost a third of these appeared in the records of the Pilgrim Baptist Church. The conference minutes of March 1849 read in part:

... the committee appointed to visit Brother Stow being present informed the Church his not attending Meting was not for want of fellowship to the Bretheren. But owing to his situation he could not attend which was satisfactory to the church.

In another case, the church wrote “Brother and sister Eaton to know the reason for their failing to attend or represent themselves with us.” And in one instance:

... the committee appointed to see Br. Jordin reported and Bro Jordin. Being present acknowledge to the Church he had done wrong in failing or neglecting to attend Church Meting and ask the Church to forgive him which the Church Frankly done

Evangelicals did their best to keep the flock together, and participation in worship services and religious activities was mandatory.

Profanity ranked fourth in the amount of disciplinary problems involving white men, making up 13.8 percent (21 cases) of the total. Thirteen of the twenty-one cases appeared in the records of the Old North Baptist Church. The Church forgave R. Scofin after he apologized for “being in a passion and (having) made use of profane language.” Although Joseph Taylor confessed to using profane language, he was excluded because he “could not bring himself to ask for forgiveness.” In another instance, Armstead Bennett accused Thomas Denson of cursing and swearing as well as neglecting to attend church. A committee was appointed to admonish Denson of his “religious duty” and to cite him to appear before the church and answer to the charges. The committee later reported that they had visited and labored with Denson as directed to no avail.
Denson was thereby excluded from the church.\textsuperscript{18}

Altogether, the four most common charges against white males that appeared in the records of antebellum Baptist churches in Texas - intoxication, improper conduct, non-attendance, and profanity - made up 70.5 percent (107 cases) of the total. This compares to Mississippi where a similar category consisting of intoxication, profanity, dancing, and fighting comprised 61 percent of the total disciplinary actions against white men. Further, in Mississippi, it was discovered that 20 percent of the disciplinary cases against white males consisted of charges of disorder, misconduct, and non-attendance while the remaining 20 percent included offenses such as theft, lying, and joining another denomination. In Texas, 9.4 percent of the total disciplinary actions against white men involved the categories of sex and family life, gambling, fighting, and race relations. The remaining 20.1 percent of the cases dealt with fraud, theft, lying, joining another denomination, and miscellaneous offenses (see table 2).\textsuperscript{19}

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|c|}
\hline
Type of Case & White Males & Black Males \\
& Number/Percentage & Number/Percentage \\
\hline
Intoxication & 31 & 20.4 & 3 \ 20.0 \\
Improper Conduct & 29 & 19.1 & 4 \ 26.7 \\
Non-Attendance & 26 & 17.2 & 1 \ 6.7 \\
Profanity & 21 & 13.8 & 0 \ 0 \\
Miscellaneous & 12 & 8.0 & 1 \ 6.7 \\
Lying, Theft, and & & & \\
Dancing & 9 & 5.9 & 2 \ 13.3 \\
Fighting & 6 & 4.0 & 1 \ 6.7 \\
Joining Another & 4 & 2.7 & 0 \ 0 \\
Denomination & & & \\
Gambling & 3 & 2.0 & 1 \ 6.7 \\
Race Relations & 3 & 2.0 & 0 \ 0 \\
Adultery & 2 & 1.3 & 1 \ 6.7 \\
Fornication & 2 & 1.3 & 1 \ 6.7 \\
Desertion of a & 1 & 0.7 & 0 \ 0 \\
Spouse & & & \\
Unscriptural Marriage & 1 & 0.7 & 0 \ 0 \\
Illegitimate Births & 1 & 0.7 & 0 \ 0 \\
\hline
TOTAL & 152 & 100.0 & 15 \ 100.0 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{DISCIPLINARY CASES}
\end{table}

The category of sex and family life accounted for 4.1 percent of the total disciplinary actions against white men in Texas. It included two adultery cases, one charge of fornication, one instance of deserting a spouse, one accusation of an unscriptural marriage, and one action for an illegitimate birth. With regard to the unscriptural marriage, the Pilgrim Baptist Church records for May 20, 1843, read in part:
By Request of E.F., and on motion investigated the marriage of said E.F. to M.L. and the Church is of the opinion that the Parties had a lawful right to come together in matrimony, as it appears to this Church from all the information she is able to get that the former woman said E.F. was married to was the wife of another man.

In another case, the Old North Baptist Church appointed a committee to investigate "certain reports in circulation against Brother W.E.C. Mayfield." Based on the committee's subsequent report, Mayfield was found by his own admission to be guilty of adultery and was excluded. There were no cases in the records dealing with bigamy or wife abuse. Since abused women had little recourse in the civil law, the church courts provided the only forum where men could be held accountable for such behavior. This was in keeping with the evangelical ideal of a marriage based on companionship, love, and mutual respect within a patriarchal arrangement.

Offenses concerning property were more prevalent against men than women, a reflection of traditional gender roles where such dealings were confined to the male sphere. This category, which included theft, fraud, and bad debts, accounted for 4 percent (6 cases) of the total disciplinary actions against white men in Texas. These were the kinds of disputes that normally could be pursued in the civil courts. However, evangelicals preferred to wash their laundry in private, and litigants were encouraged to settle their disputes within the church disciplinary process. To illustrate the point, in 1841 Thomas Starr demanded that "Brother A.B." either return a wagon and harness that Starr had loaned to him, or to reimburse Starr for the value of the items. The Pilgrim Baptist Church took the matter up in a regular conference. After an investigation, the following letter appeared in the church minutes:

Thomas Starr, To the Pilgrim Church, of the Regular Baptist Faith and order - ["]

Dear Brethren, C.D. having settled with me in Part by note, for the articles for which I held Brother A.B. accountable Therefore I am Reconciled with said Brother Respecting the charges exhibited against him at your September meeting 3d. day 1841 yet I hold him accountable for the payment executed to me by his son C.D. October 31, 1841.

Thomas Starr

Apparently, this case was "settled out of court" to the litigants' satisfaction.

There were several other examples of fraudulent behavior. The following case appeared in the records of the First Baptist Church of Galveston:

... Committee received satisfactory evidence that Brother Wright(s) partnership connections with ... E. Shepherd was unjustifiable by his obtaining a considerable amount of property contrary to the true meaning and intention of said bipartisanship.

A committee was appointed to confer with Shepherd in regard to this affair, but the church records contain nothing about the outcome or disposi-
tion of the case. On the other hand, George Whiteside was excom­
municated from the First Baptist Church of Houston after “proving
himself faithless in contracts.22

There were other offenses involving white males which, for purposes
of this study, were categorized as miscellaneous cases. They comprises
about 8 percent (12 cases) of the total disciplinary actions against white
men. One of them dealt with doing business on the Sabbath. In 1846 the
First Baptist Church of Houston appointed a committee to labor with
James House and to dissuade him from “keeping open the doors of his
bakery confectionary and selling and laboring therein on the Lord’s day.”
After consulting with House, the committee reported that he refused to
“change his course.” Upon a finding that House “wounds the feelings
of his bretheren and brings reproach on the Church of Christ and refuses
to desist therefrom,” the Church excommunicated him. A more serious
“miscellaneous” case involved R.M. Garrett, who appeared before the
Pilgrim Baptist Church and acknowledged killing a man and asked for
forgiveness, saying that he was “sorry that such a thing ever took place.”
The matter was postponed until the next regular conference. At that time,
Garrett asked for forgiveness and not to be excommunicated. The church
turned down his plea and excluded him. However, the church forgave J.W.
Parker for “becoming angry and nearly shooting another man.”23

Gambling was another category that accounted for 2 percent (3 cases)
of the total disciplinary proceedings against white males. Church
disciplinary actions would suggest that gambling was the only amusement
for which white men were disciplined in Texas. The “case of Stephenson” was considered, and he was excluded for drunkenness and gambling. Likewise, John Smith was excluded for drunkenness, profanity, and gambling. A committee of the First Baptist Church of Galveston had “received satisfactory evidence that Brother Wright frequently engaged in card playing.” Gambling, like drinking and dancing, was considered by evangelicals to be a by-product of a society “too steeped in materialism and too distant from Christ.” However, the Church records do not evidence an excessive gambling problem in Texas.24

Disciplinary actions dealing with race relations in Texas Baptist
churches were significant because only two cases appeared in the records
between 1833 and 1870. Both of them occurred in the Old North Baptist
Church, but the details are sketchy. The Church minutes for 1840 simply
record that “brother William is reconciled with black brother Norman.”
The other case was reported in greater detail in September 1852. S.F.
Sparks claimed to be “hurt” over the way in which Anthony Caldwell
had been treating a “negro man” by “chastizing him in an inhuman man-
ner.” Caldwell was excluded from the church membership. This was a
striking example of a white man disciplined for mistreating a slave. Black
slaves most likely were satisfied to see the white man held accountable
to a higher authority. No other cases involving race relations or slave code
violations appeared in the church records for this time period. The isolation and danger of the frontier setting in Texas probably brought small groups of whites and blacks together for mutual aid and protection. For whatever reason, racial conflict was absent from the Church records.25

As evidenced by the disciplinary process in antebellum Baptist churches in Texas, white males were accused of a wide variety of transgressions. As might be expected in a frontier society like that in Texas before the Civil War, there was a predominance of disciplinary cases against men for intoxication, improper conduct, and non-attendance of worship services. While men comprised approximately 40 percent of the church membership in Texas, they were disciplined in about 75 percent of the cases. This evidence supports the view that the relatively high rate of discipline for male church members in relation to their overall membership can be explained in part by the conflict between traditional "masculine" values in the antebellum South and the "feminine" virtues associated with evangelicalism. In this regard, Texas men, like their counterparts elsewhere in the South, appeared to have an uneasy, but not hopeless, struggle trying to steer a steady course.

White women in Texas Baptist churches were disciplined in 18.9 percent (42 cases) of the total actions between 1833 and 1870. Despite the fact that they comprises 48 percent of the total church membership, as compared to white men who made up 31 percent, white females were disciplined at a proportionately lower rate than their male counterparts. The higher percentage of female members has been attributed largely to the so-called feminine attributes of evangelicalism that must have appealed to women. Evangelical churches enabled nineteenth-century women to become active in ways forbidden by secular society. Women were involved in meaningful roles in worship services, revivals, camp meetings, and teaching Sunday School as well as organizing various church-related social activities. In this manner women were able to achieve some degree of equality, and even superiority, to men.26

As in the rest of the South, women in Texas Baptist churches were disciplined mainly for minor offenses. Dancing was the most common charge leveled against white females. It accounted for 23.8 percent (10 cases) of the total disciplinary actions against white women compared to only 4 percent of those against white males. Evangelicals staunchly opposed dancing and considered the practice to be inconsistent with the Scriptures [Deut. 5:15]. Women were sometimes disciplined both for dancing and visiting public halls. Kate White was excluded for "habitual attendance of public halls and dancing." Elizabeth Ellis and Sarah Moore were excluded for dancing at a party. Six of the ten disciplinary cases against white females for dancing appeared in the minutes of the Old North Baptist Church. Mary Coats and Elizabeth Baxter were forgiven by the Church when they confessed to dancing and asked for forgiveness. However, Eliza, Sarah Fraley, and Mary Parton refused to appear before the church or
to acknowledge that they had been dancing. All were excluded. Apparently, the taboo against dancing was the most overbearing facet of evangelicalism for Nacogdoches women (see table 3).27

**TABLE 3**

**DISCIPLINARY CASES**

Comparison of Number and Percentage of Disciplinary Cases Involving Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Case</th>
<th>White Females</th>
<th>Black Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number/Percentage</td>
<td>Number/Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>10 / 23.8</td>
<td>1 / 7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Attendance</td>
<td>7 / 16.7</td>
<td>2 / 15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper Conduct</td>
<td>6 / 14.3</td>
<td>2 / 15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous</td>
<td>7 / 16.7</td>
<td>1 / 7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joining another denomination</td>
<td>5 / 11.9</td>
<td>0 /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lying</td>
<td>3 / 7.1</td>
<td>2 / 15.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profanity</td>
<td>2 / 4.8</td>
<td>1 / 7.7</td>
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<td>Fighting</td>
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<td>2 / 15.4</td>
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<td>Adultery</td>
<td>1 / 2.4</td>
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<td>Unscriptural Marriage</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegitimate Births</td>
<td>1 / 2.4</td>
<td>0 /</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>**42 / 100.0</td>
<td><strong>13 / 100.0</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nearly 48 percent (20 cases) of the total disciplinary actions against white women included charges of non-attendance, improper conduct, and miscellaneous behavior which altogether made up the general category of misconduct. Non-attendance of worship services accounted for seven of the twenty cases and improper conduct appeared six times. Sarah Burnet and Sarah Stone were excommunicated from the First Baptist Church of Galveston for "abandonment of all its exercises and for unchristianlike conduct." Rachel Johnson was likewise excluded for misconduct. The First Baptist Church of Houston appointed a committee to investigate "certain rumors prejudicial to the character of Sister Wendy" and to report its findings to a special conference. Sister Wendy responded in a letter stating:

... with feelings of deep penitence, contribution and shame, I address you, I would weep tears of blood if they could wash out the stain I feel I have brought on this Church. I feel I am not worthy of a place among you. I therefore beg you will erase my name from among yours but bretheran and sisters I beg for your sympathy and prayers. I do regret with deep compunction of soul, that I have offended against God. I do resolve the balance of my days should be kept in praying to be better.

The church obliged Sister Wendy by excommunicating her.28

Joining another denomination was the third ranking category of disciplinary actions against white women in Texas, comprising 11.9 per-
cent (5 cases) of the total. White males were accused of this offense only three times in the records in this study. Mary Bigelow was excommunicated for “having united herself with the Episcopal Church.” Sarah and Margery Blanchard were excluded from the First Baptist Church of Hemphill for joining the Methodist Church. Sister E. Nail was excluded for joining another denomination. Cynthia Dorris was excluded from the Bethel Baptist Church for joining the Missionary Baptists. Church records offer no evidence as to why women joined other denominations, only that they were excluded for doing so. One view is that the Methodists offered women more opportunities to participate in church activities such as class meetings, love feasts, and revivals.

There were no disciplinary actions found against white women for intoxication in Texas Baptist churches between 1833 and 1870. Compared to the high percentage and number of intoxication cases against their males counterparts, white women in Texas appeared to be quite temperate. Likewise, only two white females were disciplined for profanity and none for fighting compared to twenty-five such cases against white men. When compared to the high number and percentage of disciplinary actions against white males for intoxication, profanity, fighting, and disorderly conduct, white females in Texas appeared to be far more restrained. It is also evidence that the church served as a social control mechanism used to control unruly manly behavior. The remaining categories of disciplinary cases involving white women were categorized as; sex and family life, property-type offenses, and individual behavior.

Sex and family life in this study included charges of adultery, fornication, leaving a spouse, illegitimate births, and unscriptural marriage. The entire category made up 4.8 percent (2 cases) of the total disciplinary actions against white women in Texas Baptist churches between 1833 and 1870 as compared to 4.1 percent (6 cases) of similar charges against white males. These figures were lower than those cited by Jean E. Friedman, which showed that 44 percent of the disciplinary actions against women in antebellum evangelical churches in North Carolina and Georgia involved sex and family life as compared to 6 percent of the same charges against men. In this sample for Texas, white women were accused once for what appeared to be adultery and once for an illegitimate birth. None were disciplined for fornication or unscriptural marriage. In one particular case, the minutes of the Pilgrim Baptist Church recorded:

The case of sister M.L. taken up and finding the charges against her Predicated in Part upon Report of a Very imprudent and immoral carrector... The church agrees to lay over the case until next meeting and appoints... committee to examon into the case... The committee on the case of sister M.L. made the following report - We your com­mittee... Have found... that she (Sister M.L.) did try and get her husband to go off telling him that if he would go and get a place that she would come to him... but her object appeared to be to get her husband away with an intention to take up and live with another man.
The case was subsequently resolved when Sister M.L. acknowledged her fault and apparently was forgiven. However, "Sister K.N." was excluded for having an illegitimate child. The interesting thing about her case was that the alleged father of the child, "Brother I.J.", was also excluded; a point that refutes Jean Friedman's argument that a double-standard existed in church disciplinary proceedings that discriminated against women.  

There were no disciplinary actions against white women in this survey concerning property. This was comparable to the rest of the antebellum South, where property violations were more common against men than women. It was also in keeping with the prevalent gender roles of the time in which property and business dealings were reserved for the male sphere.  

The general category of individual behavior included charges for profanity, fighting, lying, slander, and race relations. In Texas Baptist churches, white women were disciplined twice for profanity. Sister Blanchard confessed that she had been "using language unbecoming a christian." Her testimony proved to be satisfactory and Blanchard was forgiven by the church. Three disciplinary actions against white women for lying and slander appeared in the church records. An interesting case appeared in the minutes of the First Baptist Church of Houston that could be construed as either involving lying or race relations. A committee had been appointed to investigate a charge of falsehood against Maria Scott for spreading a rumor that Sister Fuller had not "properly chastized her negro for stealing Brother Bowles' money." Scott was also accused of slander against the church. The matter was postponed pending further investigation, but no subsequent record of the final outcome or disposition of this case was found in the church minutes. No white women were disciplined for fighting in this sample. Overall, white women compared favorably in this general category to their male counterparts, who were disciplined about thirty times for profanity, fighting, and lying.  

Based on the evidence deduced from the disciplinary proceedings in Texas Baptist churches between 1833 and 1870, women were disciplined far less than men. Friedman's conclusion that a double standard existed in church disciplinary proceedings does not hold up in this case. As Randy Sparks found to be true in Mississippi, there was no evidence of discrimination against women in the church disciplinary process. If any bias existed, as Sparks has pointed out, it operated against men who were disciplined at a higher percentage than women. On the other hand, it can be argued that the evidence does not indicate any gender discrimination in church discipline, but rather that women were more pious than men were. However, a more thorough and diverse study of antebellum evangelicalism in Texas is needed before any definitive conclusions can be reached.  

On the basis of race, there is some debate as to whether the church disciplinary process discriminated unfavorably against blacks and served as another device for white control. Randy Sparks takes issue with David
Bailey's assertion that disciplinary actions against blacks in antebellum evangelical churches in the South declined after 1830. Sparks found that the number of discipline cases against blacks in Mississippi increased after 1830. Sparks also suggests that blacks were disciplined at a higher rate than whites in Mississippi as the Civil War neared, although both races were held accountable for the same types of transgressions.14

In the six Texas Baptist churches surveyed here between 1833 and 1870, blacks made up about 21 percent of the total membership. This included approximately fifty-nine females and thirty-eight males, an almost 3:2 female-male ratio. Of the 222 total discipline cases, 12.6 percent (28 cases) involved blacks. In other words, blacks were disciplined only half as often as whites were. It is some indication that in Texas Baptist churches, as opposed to those in Mississippi, blacks were not discriminated against by the disciplinary process between 1833 and 1860. In addition, the level of discipline against blacks remained the same in Texas Baptist churches between 1833 and 1870, indicating little change over time in this regard.

| TABLE 4
| DISCIPLINARY CASES |
| Total Disciplinary Actions = 222 |
| Gender/Race         | Number | Percentage |
| Male                | 167    | 75.2       |
| Female              | 55     | 24.8       |
| White               | 194    | 87.4       |
| Black               | 28     | 12.6       |
| White Males         | 152    | 68.5       |
| White Females       | 42     | 18.9       |
| Black Males         | 15     | 6.8        |
| Black Females       | 13     | 5.8        |

A common charge leveled against black men was intoxication. For example:

Sam Walker (colored brother) came before the Church and said he had been intoxicated and was sorry for it and asked the Church to forgive him. His act was received and he was forgiven.

This case, which occurred in 1866, illustrated two significant points. First, it shows how blacks, even after emancipation, voluntarily accepted their duties and obligations as evangelical Christians. Sam Walker admitted his guilt and asked to be forgiven. Second, it shows how the evangelicals labored to keep the Christian family, black and white, together. Despite his race, Walker was forgiven. Even though some blacks, like many whites, found a release in the consumption of alcohol, intoxication did not appear to be a major problem for them. In this survey, only three disciplinary actions against black males involved intoxication. For black men, this compared favorably as opposed to white males who were accused of intoxication twenty-eight times, although in terms of percentage there was little
difference (see table 2).  

Only one disciplinary action for theft against black males appeared in this survey of church records. The single theft charge against a black man compared favorably to the six theft cases involving white males. However, thefts made up only about 4 percent of the total disciplinary cases against white men. Lawrence Levine has noted that black slaves sometimes stole, lied, or cheated out of necessity in order to satisfy urgent needs. Regardless, slaves had another way of looking at it. Since they were property, slaves viewed the taking of some of their master's other possessions to satisfy their needs as a means of using one form of property to improve another. Nevertheless, there was no evidence in the records of Texas Baptist churches that slave thefts were a serious problem.

The remaining eleven disciplinary actions against black males involved four charges of improper conduct and a single case apiece for non-attendance, dancing, lying, adultery, joining another denomination, race relations, and a miscellaneous charge. Church records revealed no disciplinary cases against black men for fighting, profanity, fornication, bigamy, desertion of a spouse, or running away. Probably, the most noteworthy case was that of David Jones, who was excluded for intemperance in 1841 after the First Baptist Church of Galveston "for the last two years (had) labored with him to no effect." Jones was restored to fellowship in the church in 1847, only to be excluded again in 1849 for "speaking disrespectfully of his brethren." All along, Jones had insisted that he was an ordained minister and had lost his license to preach prior to coming to Texas. Jones appeared to have had a long-standing propensity for mixing the bottle with preaching. Needless to say, he was a continuing menace to the church. Overall, the disciplinary proceedings in Texas Baptist churches between 1833 and 1870 do not evidence any significant degree of racial discrimination against black men.

The Texas Baptist church records also provided an example of how black slaves used the disciplinary process to bring actions against other slaves. For example, in a special conference held by the First Baptist Church of Houston for the discipline of "colored members," the case of Peter, "servant of Mr. Richardson of Galveston," was called. According to the record:

Upon the testimony of Simon, Peter appeared to have been guilty of falsehood and adultery. Jack gave evidence of the same and also said he (Peter) did not attend Church to which he only gave him to understand he did not desire to come.

After failing to appear before the church conference for trial, Peter was excluded. The subject of a separate church for blacks was raised at the same meeting but was deferred. There was one reference to a "Coloured Church meeting" in the Galveston church records in 1846, but no details were provided.
Only 5.8 percent (13 cases) of the total disciplinary actions in this study involved black women. This compared favorably to white women, who accounted for 18.9 percent (42 cases) of the total disciplinary cases. However, when consideration is given to the nearly 4:1 ratio of white to black female church members, the frequency of discipline between the two groups was about the same. In this sample, black women were disciplined twice for lying, two times for non-attendance, in two instances for improper conduct, in two cases for fighting, and twice for fornication. They also faced one charge for dancing, one for profanity, and another one for a miscellaneous offense (see table 3). For example, two black women, Henny and Charlotte, were charged with fighting and contradicting each other. A committee was appointed to investigate, and the charges against Henny were withdrawn. Charlotte was tried and excluded. In another case the records reflect:

The case of Charlotte Williams was called up ... the charge was fornication ... (She) was cited to appear but she stated that her master would not permit her ... After some deliberation it was agreed that two colored sisters, Tamar and Creasy, two colored brethren, Noble and Locke, go as a committee to see Charlotte and give her an opportunity to satisfy the Church in regard to her conduct. No subsequent records appeared in the church minutes to indicate the final outcome or disposition of Charlotte’s case. In light of the accusation, fornication, one can only speculate why Charlotte’s master refused to allow her to appear before the church conference. However, the make-up of the investigating committee, which included members of both races and sexes, suggests that the evangelicals endeavored to be fair and democratic in the church disciplinary process. In two other cases, Emeline Crain was excluded for fornication, as was “Coloured Girl Edy” for improper conduct. 38

As evidenced in the records of the six Texas Baptist churches between 1833 and 1870, blacks were disciplined less frequently than whites. Despite the short time span, there was no apparent change in the incidence of church discipline against blacks in Texas prior to 1870. In fact, both blacks and whites were disciplined for the same transgressions and at about the same frequency over the period of time examined. There was also evidence that blacks used the disciplinary process to bring charges against other blacks and were sometimes allowed to conduct their own hearings, albeit under white supervision. Above all, the records of the disciplinary proceedings support the notion that evangelical Christianity held both blacks and whites, male or female, to the same duties and obligations and judged them by the same standard, the Scriptures. In this regard, blacks were accorded a higher degree of respect and equality by the evangelical churches than by secular institutions.

There was no evidence in the church records that the disciplinary process in Texas Baptist churches functioned primarily as a white control
device over black slaves. Not a single case involving slave rebelliousness, running away, striking masters, or any other serious violations of the slave code appeared in the records. Only one example of what might be assumed to be black dissidence appeared in the records of the Bethel Baptist Church in McMahan, Texas, after the Civil War. The church minutes for September 1866 record:

Whereas the colored members of the Church have absented themselves from Church meeting ever since they were liberated from Slavery; therefore the church appoints A. Baker and R. Cole to see and talk with as many as they conveniently can, and report the result of their labors ... as soon as convenient.

The Bethel Church waited until January 1870 for their black brethren to return. When they failed to do so, the church excluded all of its black members. As Katharine Dvorak has pointed out, blacks were not necessarily forced out of evangelical churches in the South after the Civil War, but instead, distanced themselves from whites. Blacks probably felt more comfortable worshipping in their own style and believed that whites had strayed away from the "true" meaning of Christianity. Further, black segregation from biracial churches may also have been a symbolic method by which blacks tested out the meaning of their newly acquired freedom after the Civil War.  

As stated previously, the evidence deduced from this analysis of the records of the disciplinary proceedings in six Texas Baptist churches between 1833 and 1870 is by no means conclusive. A larger and more diverse sample of church records would lend more credence to any generalizations about the fairness of the disciplinary process in terms of race and gender. Nevertheless, based on the findings in this sample, several tentative deductions can be made. First, blacks enjoyed a semblance of equality and respect in antebellum evangelical churches that was unavailable to them in the secular world. Second, women likewise achieved a level of equality and respect within the evangelical churches that was denied to them in the secular world. To be sure, there were some limits, but given the time period and the surrounding environment, blacks and women were better off in the church than in the secular world. Third, the disciplinary process did not appear to operate primarily as a white control device, although, as a practical matter, the low number and percentage of slave disciplines in Texas could perhaps be viewed as achieving the same result. On the other hand, it could be argued that more blacks were not disciplined because they were simply better Christians than whites. Or, perhaps, blacks were held to a slightly less demanding moral code. The same argument could be made in the case of gender, where fewer women than men were disciplined. Finally, there appeared to be little change over time in regard to the increase or decrease in the number or types of disciplinary actions against blacks or whites, male or female, in Texas between 1833 and 1870. In terms of the number of disciplinary cases in relation to church membership figures, neither women nor blacks were discriminated against in the
church courts of antebellum Texas. If the quest was for equal justice in the antebellum South, then the “moral courts” of the evangelical churches were a lone sanctuary.

### TABLE 5

**DISCIPLINARY CASES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Case</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
<th>Percent of Total</th>
<th>White Males</th>
<th>White Females</th>
<th>Black Males</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Improper Conduct</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>70.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>9.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-Attendance</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>2.8</td>
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<td>Intoxication</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>91.2</td>
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<td>8.8</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Profanity</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Miscellaneous</td>
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<td>10.0</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>27.3</td>
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<td>4.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dancing</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>55.6</td>
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<td>5.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fraud, Theft, and Lying</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joining Another Denomination</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>11.0</td>
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<td>Fighting</td>
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<td>33.3</td>
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<td>Fornication</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adultery</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
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<td>33.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race Relations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>66.7</td>
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<td>33.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gambling</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Illegitimate Births</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desertion of a Spouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unscriptural Marriage</td>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTES**


First Baptist Church of Houston Records, April 1849; Old North Baptist Church of Nacogdoches Records, April 1860 (Reprinted edition located in the Clayton Library in Houston, Texas); Pilgrim Baptist Church Records, March 1836; First Baptist Church of Galveston Records, November 1849 (Microfilm copy located in the Rosenberg Library in Galveston, Texas).

First Baptist Church of Galveston Records, June 1856; First Baptist Church of Hemp hill Records, August 1861 (Reprinted edition located in the Clayton Library in Houston, Texas); Pilgrim Baptist Church Records, April 1845.

Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, pp. 80-87, 168; Allan Gallay, "Planters and Slaves in the Great Awakening," in Boles, ed., Masters and Slaves, p. 25; Sparks, "A Mingled Yarn," p. 120; Old North Baptist Church Records, August 1856, May 1860, June 1869.

Pilgrim Baptist Church Records, March 1849, August 1848, October 1849.

Old North Baptist Church Records, April 1865, October 1865; Pilgrim Baptist Church Records, September 1841, October 1841.

Sparks, "A Mingled Yarn," p. 121.

Pilgrim Baptist Church Records, May 1843; Old North Baptist Church Records, August-September 1867; Sparks, "A Mingled Yarn," p. 122.

Pilgrim Baptist Church Records, September 1841, December 1841; Sparks, "Religion in Amite County," in Boles, ed., Masters and Slaves, p. 74.

First Baptist Church of Galveston Records, March 1841, April 1842; First Baptist Church of Houston Records, July 1847, October 1847.

First Baptist Church of Houston Records, September-December 1846, March 1847; Pilgrim Baptist Church Records, December 1865, January-March 1866, January 1846.

First Baptist Church of Houston Records, April 1849; First Baptist Church of Hem phill Records, April 1870; First Baptist Church of Galveston Records, March 1841; Gallay, "Planters and Slaves in the Great Awakening," in Boles, ed., Masters and Slaves, p. 25.

Old North Baptist Church Records, 1840, September 1852, May 1853.


Isaac, Transformation of Virginia, pp. 80-87; Sparks, "A Mingled Yarn," p. 135;
First Baptist Church of Galveston Records, August-September 1856; First Baptist Church of Houston Records, August 1850.

29 First Baptist Church of Galveston Records, July 1847; First Baptist Church of Hemphill Records, December 1862; Bethel Baptist Church Records, March 1864, July-August 1859; Sparks, "A Mingled Yarn," p. 136.


Sparks, "A Mingled Yarn," p. 139.

First Baptist Church of Hemphill Records, September 1861; First Baptist Church of Houston Records, August-September 1849.


Bailey, Shadow on the Church, pp. 191-92; Sparks, "A Mingled Yarn," pp. 141-42.

Old North Baptist Church Records, July 1866.


First Baptist Church of Houston Records, May 1850; First Baptist Church of Galveston Records, February 1846.

Pilgrim Baptist Church Records, December 1865, February 1866; First Baptist Church of Houston Records, May 1850, March 1843; Old North Baptist Church Records, April 1872.