

Southern Baptists and Church Discipline

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For more than twenty years voting majorities at the annual meetings of the Southern Baptist Convention have endorsed a “conservative” platform based on a commitment to the inerrancy of the scriptures. They have rejected the “moderate” platform based on freedom and toleration. The argument was not theoretical. The question at stake was whether the convention had authority to establish doctrinal boundaries—to enforce doctrinal orthodoxy as a condition of service as a trustee or employee of the convention’s boards and seminaries. When convention majorities voted in favor of inerrancy, they asserted that the convention had authority to judge religious beliefs in its appointments.

In our churches, however, we demonstrate considerable ambivalence toward asserting such authority. We want to make certain that our missionaries and seminary professors are orthodox in faith and pure in behavior, but we tolerate much lower standards in our churches. Pastors, missionaries, and teachers are rightly held to higher standards. But our churches falter in enforcing New Testament standards of church membership. Once persons have prayed the sinner’s prayer and submitted to immersion, their membership is secure in most churches for as long as they wish to remain a member—usually longer.

Most of our churches do not wish to tolerate sin and heresy. In many churches immoral members receive attention from the pastor and other leaders. The leaders

put them through counseling and remove them from committees and public roles. But immorality and heresy rarely jeopardize membership. Churches in practice deny their authority to judge the belief and behavior of individual members. This was not always the case. Before the twentieth century Baptist churches in the South exercised strict authority over the behavior and belief of their individual members. They expressed this authority primarily in the practice of church discipline.

Baptist Church Discipline in the Nineteenth-Century South

In 1806 William Barnes became estranged from some of the members of the Savannah First Baptist Church and requested letters of dismissal in order that he and his family might join another church. The church believed that Barnes had neglected his religious duties and charged him with “continued absence from the church, and from the Table of the Lord, at our communion.” Pastor Henry Holcombe advised the church to deal with him gently and so they pronounced against him “the lowest censure of the church, to wit, rebuke.” Barnes ignored the action.¹

One month later, the church again cited him to answer for his absence. They interpreted his withdrawal as rebellion against their authority and grieved at “the apparent contempt with which Brother William B. Barnes has for a long time treated us, by his perpetual absence from our days of discipline, as well as from our

communion seasons, not partaking with us of the Lord's Supper."

When Henry Williams delivered the church's message, Barnes exploded in frustration. His attempts to cast off ecclesiastical control had failed. According to Williams's account, Barnes "appeared very angry, expressed dissatisfaction with some of the brethren, and at length swore profanely that he would not appear at any ecclesiastical court, for that he hated them, and always had hated them, etc." When Barnes did not appear as summoned, the church disbarred him from the privileges of membership, including the Lord's Supper, and resolved "that Brother William B. Barnes, not only for his repeated contempt of this church, but also for the horrid sin of profane swearing, be suspended."

The church's forbearance extended two months more. Then they excommunicated him.

Our beloved pastor [Henry Holcombe] stated to the church that it was long since the church had expected that our brother William B. Barnes would have been publicly expelled by excommunication from the special privileges of this church, that he however had thought proper to write to him, and had used every argument to induce his return to his duty and to order, hoping thereby to gain him by love, that he had also received letters from him, but that he was sorry to inform the church that there was no reason, from the spirit in which he wrote, to hope for his wished for restoration. The church, after expressing much sorrow, for the necessity which impelled them, unanimously resolved to excommunicate the offending brother from this church, but in order that the cup of forbearance should, as it were, be drained towards him, they agreed that his sentence should not be made public till next Lord's Day a week, that he

may have opportunity to seek restoration on gospel principles.

When the church informed Barnes, he "said he was willing they proceed to his excommunication." On Sunday, pastor Henry Holcombe, "towards the latter part of his forenoon sermon in a very moderate and delicate manner pronounced the church's act of excommunication against Mr. William B. Barnes." In the final action of this four-month drama, the Savannah Baptist Church demoted "Brother Barnes" to "Mr. Barnes."

If he did not know it before, Barnes discovered the hard way that Baptists accepted no opposition to the principle of ecclesiastical authority. To an antebellum Baptist, a church without discipline had little claim to be a church of Christ. For this reason Savannah Baptists refused to permit Barnes to absent himself from their "days of discipline." For the same reason, the church refused to allow Barnes's "contempt" to go unrebuked. Baptists installed discipline at the center of church life and required their members to submit to the church's authority.

Nineteenth-century Southern Baptists exercised church discipline on a remarkable scale. Because they believed that it was a divine ordinance instituted by the Head of the church, they exercised discipline with unremitting ardor. Year after year they repeated the Barnes affair throughout the South. By the time of the Civil War Southern Baptists had excommunicated more than forty thousand members in Georgia alone. Baptist churches in the southern states brought to trial between 3 and 4 percent of their membership every year. They excommunicated about half of those brought to trial, excluding between 1 and 2 percent of their membership annually.²

Churches attended to their discipline at their monthly church conferences. Most churches had worship only once per month. On the Saturday prior to the monthly service they held their conference. Here they dealt with all matters of fellowship, including discipline. The discipline sometimes began when an individual arose to accuse himself. "Brother Lovall accused himself of drinking too much spiritous liquor and of getting into a great rage of anger at the same time," or "brother Dread Wilder came forward and observed that he had lately gotten very angry, for which ordered that he be reproved by the Moderator which was done."³

More commonly one of the leaders of the congregation, usually a deacon, accused. For example, "Brother Jones from the Board of Deacons, preferred charges of profanity and unchristian conduct against Brother Oppenheim." The church then appointed a discipline committee, as in this case, to "investigate the matter, and cite Brother Oppenheim to appear before the church and answer said charges." Such committees reported their findings and recommended either guilt or innocence. The church sometimes rejected the report and charged the committee to do a better job. When they accepted the report, they could either follow the recommendation or not. If the church found the accused guilty, they moved on to the sentence.⁴

Accused members who denied their guilt gained acquittal almost half the time. But the accused confessed their guilt in more than 90 percent of cases. The churches generally sought to be fair and to discover the truth. The members generally submitted and acknowledged their crimes.⁵

Once the church convicted an offender, they imposed one of two sentences. Those offenders who were guilty of less serious offenses and who repented of them received "rebuke" or "censure" from the moderator of the conference. He explained the nature of the offense, why it was immoral according to the scriptures, and how it injured the glory of Christ and the soul of the offender. The church however retained in fellowship the member thus admonished.

Those offenders who did not repent received excommunication. So did those who committed serious offenses—whether they repented or not. Excommunication was exclusion from the fellowship of the church. It withdrew the privileges of membership. Excluded persons could not participate in the Lord's Supper, could not vote in conference, and no longer bore the title "brother" or "sister." This did not mean that they were not truly redeemed. It meant rather that the person's belief or behavior was incompatible with church membership.

In most churches pastors pronounced the sentence. When Newnan (Georgia) Baptist Church excluded Jeremiah Mulloy, the clerk's *et ceteras* indicated the use of a formula: "The sentence was immediately pronounced by the Moderator that Jere Mulloy was no more known as brother, etc. etc." One clerk left a detailed description of how William B. Johnson, pastor of Savannah Baptist Church and later the first president of the Southern Baptist Convention, addressed Elizabeth Jones:

Our pastor proceeded to the painful, solemn act of declaring to her in the presence of the church her expulsion from its fellowship and privileges. In doing this he opened to her view the dreadful nature and tendency of the crime she had so

habitually committed for a long time. He explained to her the nature of the obligations she had been brought under to abstain from all sin. He stated to her the guilt she had contracted in violation of these obligations by the commission of the crime for which she was excommunicated. The nature and design of the awful censure which she had incurred was explained also, and the whole enforced upon her heart and conscience with encouraging words to induce her to turn from the error of her ways to the Lord for mercy and pardon.

By such declarations of ecclesiastical authority churches expressed their confidence that they acted in obedience to the explicit commands of Christ and his apostles.⁶

The churches restored about one-third of excommunicants to membership. Excluded members who repented of the offense gained restoration. The churches judged the repentance. They expected penitents to attend the worship services regularly and to persevere in righteous behavior for three to twelve months after their exclusion. They then appeared before the church, confessed their sin, vindicated the church's action and authority, and pledged to lead a moral life. Churches judged such a repentance genuine and restored the excommunicate to membership.

Discipline sometimes troubled the church and divided the members into factions. Sometimes churches formally separated. But remarkably few persons resisted the church's authority. Most recognized the church's right to enforce standards of belief and behavior through discipline.

The churches practiced discipline democratically. In most churches every member voted. The majority of churches

permitted women members to vote, though some restricted this. In many churches the black members voted also. Church authority, they held, inhered in the congregation jointly.

Women made up the majority of the church membership in Southern Baptist churches in the nineteenth century, constituting between 60 and 65 percent of the membership. But the men kept the machinery going by providing a steady stream of offenders to the church conferences. Men were the offenders in 74 percent of cases. On average the churches hauled one out of every twelve white male members before the church every year.⁷

Baptists typically distinguished between grave and minor offences. Grave offenses intrinsically damaged the reputation of Christ and his church in the eyes of the world. They demanded immediate and decisive action. Churches generally excluded persons guilty of grave offenses whether they repented or not. Those guilty of lesser offenses generally retained their membership after confessing their sin and accepting a rebuke from the moderator.

The churches noticed a broad range of offences: drunkenness, absence from church, resisting the authority of the church, interpersonal hostility, slander, anger, quarreling, cursing, swearing, profanity, falsehood, adultery, fornication, fighting, abuse, theft, debt evasion, neglecting family, neglecting duty, Sabbath-breaking, dancing, horse-racing, and gambling. Baptist churches indicted members who did such things.

Purposes of Church Discipline

Church discipline was always difficult and unpleasant. The wonder is not that Baptists practiced it on a large scale but

that they practiced it at all. But Baptists persevered in church discipline because they believed that discipleship required it. Christ commanded his churches to exclude those who were immoral or who denied the doctrines of the gospel. They could not in good conscience call themselves Christians while ignoring a clear command of Christ.

Baptists drew encouragement in their practice however from reflecting on the benefits of discipline. The benefits, they felt, were basically three: discipline kept the churches pure and thereby glorified Christ; discipline aided the offenders themselves; and discipline fostered revival and the conversion of sinners.

Discipline kept the churches pure by expelling the wicked. It also exposed hypocrites and excised the old leaven. It also motivated the rest of the membership to pursue holiness. J. M. Chiles, a South Carolina pastor, described this benefit of church discipline in 1856:

“Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.” Thus will it serve as a check upon sin, and an incentive to holiness. It will further benefit the church by increasing it[s] spirituality. Obedience to the divine command is always attended with the divine blessing, and the exclusion of unworthy members, will remove those who were as an incumbent [encumbrance] to the advancing prosperity of the body. It cannot be supposed that all who unite with the church are genuine Christians. Some are deceived mistaking partial awakenings for thorough convictions, and partial reformation for thorough conversion. Others act hypocritically and impose upon the church by a mere picture of piety to accomplish a selfish end.

Baptists exercised discipline for the benefit of the offender also. Baptists agreed

with Chiles that “the individual under censure will be benefited by strict and prompt discipline, being convinced that the law of Christ condemns his conduct, and that the church must enforce that law.” Discipline was a medicine of the soul for straying members.⁸

Baptists also believed that their strict discipline supported evangelism and the conversion of sinners. James P. Boyce, pastor of Columbia (South Carolina) Baptist Church and founding president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, urged this consideration in 1852:

Another reason to exercise church discipline is, that thus only can the church be led to perform the glorious work of evangelizing the world. Not only is it true that to none but a holy church will the Holy Spirit be given as an assistant, and as a consequence of this, it could have no success; but the want of obedience to Christ’s will in minor matters, and of conformity to his example in ordinary life, will prevent obedience to him with respect to those commands which require the exercise of self-denial, and the putting forth of earnest and continued effort, and conformity to an example so far above that which man can attain, without divine assistance, as to give of itself sufficient proof of the discipleship of him who thus conforms.

Both church discipline and personal evangelism went against the grain of personal comfort. If Christians did not exercise the self-denial requisite to keep up church discipline, they could not be expected to exercise the denial requisite for evangelism. Disobedience in one area could be expected to spread to the other.⁹

Baptists believed also that God poured out the blessings of the Holy Spirit upon churches that were strict and faithful in their discipline. In 1817 Georgia, an eyewitness recalled, “brother Lancaster,” a

member of the Powelton Baptist Church, “rendered himself obnoxious to discipline” by allowing the young people at his house to dance at his daughter’s wedding. The dancers conducted themselves with decorum and Lancaster saw no harm in celebrating the occasion with fiddling and dancing. The church saw the matter differently. On conference day, “after singing and prayer, the ecclesiastical court was opened, the Rev. Jesse Mercer, the pastor of said church, presiding as moderator.” A large crowd attended, some for and some against Lancaster. Mercer introduced the case to the congregation, explained the rules of “the judicatory,” and delineated the reasons why fiddling and dancing should be considered immoral: modern dancing was sensual and lascivious, and it would be impossible for Christians embarking upon a dance “to invoke the blessing of God by prayer.” He urged the church to settle the “vexed question” of dancing once and for all.¹⁰

Mercer, president of the Georgia Baptist Convention from 1822 to 1840, gained fame as a pastor, preacher, and denominational leader. His ability to manage discipline proceedings was reputedly without equal—he rarely failed to carry his point. The Lancaster trial was no exception. Lancaster rose from his seat and admitted that the accusation was true, “but never until now have I been prepared to confess its guilt.” Mercer’s “learned and lucid address” convinced him that he was a transgressor. Normally at this point in the trial, the offender would have requested forgiveness, and the church would have granted it, but now the accused turned accuser, and some of the members egged him on: “Let him go on! Let him go on!” Mercer thought Lancaster out of order, but agreed to allow it: “Let

us have a thorough winnowing of the wheat and get rid of the chaff.”

Lancaster charged that the church cried out against dancing and fiddling when more serious offenses passed without censure. Turning to the assembled members, he indicted them for Sabbath breaking, partiality, worldliness, and gossiping. The church stigmatized the tunes of five-dollar fiddles in the cabins of the poor as worldly, Lancaster insinuated, but blessed the notes of eight-hundred-dollar pianos in the mansions of the rich as an “innocent recreation.” The women of the church, his chief accusers, had refined away their piety, lavishing praise on the “frothy” discourses of important preachers, but showering contempt on the simple sermons of plain, rustic ministers.

When Lancaster’s courage failed, Mercer encouraged him to continue, saying that it was good “that our faults be exposed, and that we ought to submit to have them whipped in the proper spirit of charity.” The women likewise shouted “Go on! Go on! We want to know what it is that sticks in your throat.” When Lancaster finished, he asked forgiveness for the frolic. Mercer “rose in tears,” offering prayer that God would make the trial an “occasion of a gracious outpouring of his Spirit, of burying all animosities and ill feelings.” The church then “rose up to greet and shake hands with the offending brother, and to sing and rejoice together—and that was the commencement of the most signal revival ever had in that church.” According to Baptists like Mercer, “a thorough winnowing of the wheat” resulted in a harvest of souls and renewed devotion to God.

The Lapse of Church Discipline

In the 1870s the practice of church dis-

cipline in Southern Baptist churches began to subside. The trend accelerated in subsequent decades. By the 1930s discipline was quite rare—most reported exclusions were merely the cleaning of church rolls of names of members long inactive and forgotten. In the 1940s most associations stopped bothering to record exclusions.

No Baptist leaders opposed discipline. They on the contrary urged its recovery. Z. T. Cody, the talented and engaging editor of *South Carolina's Baptist Courier*, lamented the loss of discipline in 1921:

Our churches have practically no discipline. As to worldliness and minor offences, many of our churches do nothing. But what is far worse, our churches often allow the most serious moral transgressions to go unnoticed. Even at times, to save a disturbance in the church, they will grant a minister a letter who, as they know, has grossly violated, not only the proprieties of life, but the moral law of God. . . . What we dread today more than aught else is a disturbance in the "peace" of a church. . . . We do not know what is the remedy for this lapsed condition.

Victor Masters, George W. Truett, J. B. Gambrell, and other denominational leaders of the early twentieth century exhorted Southern Baptists to recover church discipline. But there was no recovery. Like an ebb tide it slipped away.¹¹

The causes are complex. Such factors as urbanization, faith in moral and social progress, civil religion, activism, and the search for church efficiency contributed. Commitment to an expansive individualism grew in response to such cultural trends and undermined the traditional Baptist commitment to the authority of the congregation. Belief in the authority of the congregation is foundational to discipline.

Its lapse meant the loss of discipline.

Twenty-First-Century Prospects

Southern Baptists have established their commitment to the inerrancy of the scriptures. These scriptures teach the obligation of the churches to protect their purity by church discipline. Yet most Southern Baptist churches manifest little zeal to obey the scripture here.

Recovery will not be easy should it ever occur. There are powerful trends running counter to all that discipline entails. Our local church ecclesiology is weak in theory and practice—that is, we can not find a scriptural ecclesiology, so we substitute whatever seems to promote conversion and denominational loyalty. We lack spirituality—we fear humans more than God. We are worldly. We surely have a large percentage of unregenerate church members. We do not trust God to accomplish his will in his way. We refuse to insist upon a scripture teaching that affects anyone other than ourselves. We do not have that confidence in interpretation that is willing to take responsibility for it.

Victor Masters, who edited Baptist papers in Virginia, South Carolina, and Kentucky, concluded that Baptists did not exercise church discipline because they nurtured a false sentimentality:

Sentimentality is an enemy of church discipline. Sentimentality is the love of man divorced from the love of truth. Under the specious guise of broadened sympathies it cloaks a big lot of hypocrisy and moral decay. The church sentimentalist is so kind to his fellow church member that he is willing to ignore the plain instructions of the Book of his faith rather than bring him to account for unchristian conduct. "Judge not that ye be not judged," he quotes, but he forgets to quote (1 Cor. 5:12, 13) "Do not ye judge them

that are within, whereas them that are without God judgeth.”¹²

The reasons that led to the decline of discipline are with us still. J. C. Hiden has summarized the problems:

While it is true that a Baptist church is, in theory, a body of regenerated, baptized believers, it can hardly be doubted that, in our wild scramble for numbers, we of this generation—preachers and people—are becoming less and less disposed to insist upon what our fathers used to call the marks of a genuine “grace experience” on the part of those who offer themselves as candidates for baptism and church membership. . . . If a long church-roll were any evidence of efficiency, or if large numbers were indication of large graces, it would be easy to understand this all prevailing anxiety for numbers. But when it is perfectly clear to the dullest apprehension among us, that such is not the case, it must be confessed that this wild desire for counting up our hosts is too highly suggestive of David’s sad sin in numbering Israel. Who, where, and of what value are the multitudinous hosts of Baptists that we put into the Associations and Conventions in the bounds of the Southern Baptist Convention?

He wrote this in 1877; it is truer now.¹³

And then there are the objections to discipline. Some will argue that it is contrary to scripture. Scripture says “Judge not lest ye be judged.” But this verse deals not with church discipline but with personal hypocrisy. Scripture on the contrary requires us to judge. For Christ commanded his churches in Matthew 18:15-17 to judge and expel the member who sinned against his brother but did not repent. Paul taught the same duty in 1 Corinthians 5:12. Many commands in the New Testament require the churches to judge the teaching and behavior of mem-

bers (e.g., 2 Thess 3:14; 1 Tim 5:20; Tit 3:10; 2 John 3:10). Jesus commends the church at Ephesus because they “cannot tolerate wicked men” (Rev 2:2) and he rebukes the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira for tolerating false teaching and false teachers (Rev 2:14-16, 20-23).

Some will object that discipline violates soul liberty. We have a right, they say, to serve God as we believe that he requires. I grant this. But, they say, church discipline will interfere with this right. This I reject. Discipline does not interfere with any member’s rights. It does not seek to coerce or constrain persons against their will, though it does seek to move the will. The church rightly replies that its members are free to do as they see fit, but they must grant the church the same freedom they claim for themselves. The church has a right to do what it believes God requires it to do. The church should not seek to coerce an immoral member. It merely says, “If you commit immorality and refuse repentance, we must exclude you from our fellowship.” The individual is as free as ever to pursue immorality. But he or she may no longer do so as a member of that church.

Nineteenth-century Baptists argued precisely this. In 1825 Georgia pastor Samuel Law argued that if the churches could not exercise discipline they would not be free but would be captive to immorality.

To deny the right of a church to take cognizance of the religious sentiments of its members would be to sacrifice the liberty of the society to the licentiousness of the individual. And [it would be] to say, no body of Christians have any right to determine that they will unite with those only who are nearly agreed in their religious sentiments. . . . For two cannot walk comfortably together

except they be agreed; nor can a Christian society flourish, where important truth is sacrificed to worldly policy, under the specious name of candor and liberality.

Baptists submitted both their behavior and their beliefs to the authority of the congregation.¹⁴

Some will object similarly that church discipline destroys our individual freedom to interpret the Bible for ourselves. As individuals we have freedom to interpret for ourselves. This now means something different from what it once meant however. It once meant that the state should leave persons free to interpret the scripture themselves, that it should establish no church by law and impose no creed by coercion.

The reason individuals had to be free to interpret was because God required them to hear his word and obey it. Christians are obligated to do God's will. To know our duty we must interpret his word. We will each have to give account before God for our actions. To plead that we disobeyed because the state commanded it is to say merely that we feared humans more than God. But state churches illegitimately punished those who obeyed. The state churches for example opposed believer's baptism. Baptists understood scripture to require this as a matter of obedience. Baptists suffered persecution at the urging or with the consent of state churches. They needed religious freedom in order to obey without state interference. The freedom served an obligation.

Churches as well as individuals are obliged to interpret the word of God. God imposes some duties on churches as churches. Church discipline is such a duty. Hence, the freedom of the individual to interpret the word can be no greater than

the freedom of the church to do the same. If the church is to obey God it must come to a corporate understanding of what the scripture declares to be its duties. Nineteenth-century Baptists did this.

They did not always come to consensus. Sometimes in fact the difference of opinion resulted in schism. Long Run Baptist Church in Kentucky divided in 1804 when they disagreed about whether it was sinful to tell a lie to save a life: "Suppose a man has five children. The Indians come and kill four of them, the fifth one being hidden near by. The savages then ask the father if he has another child. Would he be justifiable in telling them that he had not?" After impassioned debate the "lying party" withdrew and formed a new church. But regardless of the results, duty to God meant that they had to try.¹⁵

Disagreements did not discourage them. When differences emerged they investigated the scriptures and discussed and argued from the relevant texts. In 1816 the Columbia (South Carolina) First Baptist Church decided a dispute about working on Sunday: "The business of the church was then entered on; when it appeared that brother E. Arledge who had been engaged in butchering bears on the Sabbath days and had been spoken to on the subject by brother Wilkins, had appealed to the church for a decision on the case whether it was not admissible for him to continue in the practice. The church however decided that it was improper and that brother Arledge ought to desist from the practice, which brother Arledge agrees to do." The church arrived at a corporate interpretation. Individual members submitted to the church's decision.¹⁶

It is of course specious to argue that just because we can not always agree on the interpretation of our duties, we should not

enforce obedience by discipline. Perfect antisepsis in surgical operations is impossible, but that is no argument for neglecting to sterilize operating rooms. The persistence of a few germs is no reason to perform surgery in the sewer. The attempt at antisepsis improves the outcome considerably. So likewise the attempt to interpret our duties and discipline improves the results.

Some will object that discipline will injure the church. Our first concern however should be doing God's will. One of the earmarks of the Reformed Protestant piety with which English-speaking Baptists have traditionally identified is confidence in God's power. There is a kind of motto of this piety: "Attend to duty; leave the results to God." In the area of church discipline we do not trust his power or his word and effectively usurp his authority in the churches by refusing to do our known duty. In fact discipline will bring all the benefits that our nineteenth-century predecessors described.

Some will object that discipline will harm missions and evangelism. But obedience to God is no obstacle to conversion. We can not expect God's blessing upon churches in deliberate and indifferent disobedience to his plain command. God has blessed Southern Baptist churches in the twentieth century in spite of our disobedience. Evidence has been growing for at least a generation that God may be withdrawing his blessing.

In 1874 A. B. Woodfin, who was pastor of churches in Virginia, South Carolina, and Alabama, urged the churches to faithfulness:

I believe this [church discipline] is the most important subject that can engage the pulpit at this time. Until our churches purge out the old

leaven, it will be utterly vain to pray for conversion of souls. . . . An organization which has no corrective church discipline, whatever else it may be, is scarcely fit to be called a church of Jesus Christ; for the Lord has said, "Offences must needs come," "Put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

Woodfin's words ought to carry even greater conviction in our own day.¹⁷

ENDNOTES

¹ Church Book, Savannah First Baptist Church, Savannah, Ga., 2 May 1806-14 Sept. 1806, Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University, Macon, Ga. This account of the Barnes case is closely adapted from my *Democratic Religion: Freedom, Authority, and Church Discipline in the Baptist South, 1785-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 11-12. In quotes from nineteenth-century sources, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have been conformed to modern usage; some abbreviations have been spelled out.

² These statistics derive from the annual reports of more than 3,000 association meetings in Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

³ Church Book, Powelton Baptist Church, Hancock Co., Ga., 4 Aug. 1798 (both), Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University, Macon, Ga.

⁴ The example is from Church Book, Columbia First Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C., 4 June 1874, Baptist Historical Collection, James B. Duke Library, Furman University, Greenville, S.C., microfilm.

⁵ These statistics derive from an analysis of the minutes of thirty-seven Baptist churches in Georgia from 1785 to 1900,

for a total of 2,019 church-years. For more discussion of the usual procedures of church discipline, see Wills, 37-49.

⁶Church Book, Newnan First Baptist Church, Newnan, Ga., 26 Feb. 1831, Special Collections, Main Library, Mercer University, Macon, Ga.

⁷See Wills, 50-59.

⁸J. M. Chiles, "Circular Letter," in Edgefield (S.C.) Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1856, 16.

⁹James P. Boyce, "Church Discipline—Its Importance," *Southern Baptist*, 18 Feb. 1852, 2.

¹⁰This account of the Lancaster case is from Wills, 26-28.

¹¹Z. T. Cody, "The Lapse of Church Discipline," *Baptist Courier*, 6 Oct. 1921, 4. See also Victor Masters, "The Decadence of Discipline," *Baptist Courier*, 17 July 1902, 2; George W. Truett, "Church Discipline," *Baptist Courier*, 23 Sept. 1915, 1-2; J. B. Gambrell, "Southern and Northern Baptists," *Christian Index*, 11 May 1893, 1.

¹²Victor Masters, "Church Discipline," *Baptist Courier*, 21 Aug. 1902, 1-2.

¹³J. C. Hiden, "Looseness of Discipline," *Working Christian*, 22 Mar. 1877, 2.

¹⁴Samuel Law, "Circular Letter," in Sunbury (Ga.) Baptist Association, *Minutes*, 1825, 11-12.

¹⁵J. H. Spencer, *A History of Kentucky Baptists from 1769-1885* (Cincinnati: J. H. Spencer, 1885), 1:355-356.

¹⁶Church Book, Columbia First Baptist Church, Columbia, S.C., 19 Oct. 1816, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, S.C.

¹⁷A. B. Woodfin, quoted in C. M.

McJunkin, untitled, *Working Christian*, 20 Apr. 1876, 2.