

History of South Apalachin Baptist Church by Pastor Walter

Transformation years, 1968 forward

Definition of that transformation - Change from merely a fundamental Baptist church into a redeemed, regenerated, united body of believers loving one another with each member holding Jesus Christ in pre-eminence (Colossians 1:13-23).

That is something only God Himself can do. As I said in my life's testimony, I saw Him transform many lives through preaching Christ, His Word, and His Cross (His death, burial and resurrection).

One important incident in the early years of South Apalachin Church's transformation was Don and Vivian Bond's motor home. It was also transformed from a large GMC van into missionaries Don and Vivian Bond's home. That transformation took place in 1971 and 1972 in the driveway of the then new parsonage which is at present Pastor Dan and Peggy's home.

That motor home was a major topic of conversation we had with Don and Vivian a short time ago over in Maranatha Village, a community mainly for retired missionaries and pastors down here in Sebring, Florida. They are now 90 years old living in the assisted care unit of that facility. That afternoon this old pastor and his elderly wife laughed, rejoiced, shed a few tears, and prayed together as we recalled those times so many years ago.



South Apalachin's relationship with the Bonds all started when Lois Stone, now Lois Strope for 40 plus years, had a college roommate by the name of Linda Bond. Lois suggested that we have Linda's parents present their work in Peru to our church, which we did. I have never before or since then, been more impressed by a missionary presentation than I was that evening. I saw a missionary couple who knew they were called to go to Peru and do God's work in God's way. The fact that impressed me above all else is that they had been doing it for nearly 20 years, living on a river boat, in villages along the Amazon River in Peru. Now they were being led of God to do the same thing in the Andes Mountains living in a motor home, but not just any motor home. It was to be a motor home constructed to take a beating, as it would never be on hard smooth roads.



After that evening service I took the Bonds to see the travel trailer that I had built several years previously. After looking it over Don said it was very similar to what he had in mind to be done with the GMC Van that they had already purchased.

Leaving out many of the details that took place, after several months their van was in the parsonage drive way, the Bonds were back in Peru, and my wife and I had made a trip to Elkhart, Indiana and several trips to Fletcher's Trailer Sales in Trumansburg for materials, etc. needed to transform that van into the Bond's home.

For nearly a year that van sat there in the Parsonage driveway slowly going through an inward transformation. I said slowly because those of us who did the work had our days filled with our regular routine of jobs and families to care for. There were times when days went by without anything being done. Without myself being there, it was very little that anyone could do with the exception of Ed Swackhammer. He did all the mechanical and welding work. (Extra-large gas tank, motor cycle rack on front, generator under the hood and slide out rack for large generator in rear etc.).

I hesitate to give names of all who did different things for fear of leaving someone out, but here I feel I must mention a few who were there to help over and over again along with Ted and Irene Fletcher owners of Fletchers Trailer Sales in Trumansburg, who contributed the use of their truck to go to Elkhart, Indiana and gave many incidentals needed in the construction of the van. They had done the same for me when I built our travel trailer two years previously and their son forty five years later is still helping me. When we moved to South Apalachin I was conducting a new believer's course in their home. They have long since gone home to be with the Lord, they had trusted shortly before we came here to South Apalachin.

Another person who gave several days working with me on the electrical wiring was Selden Butler, Lorraine Costley's father, but the one who was there every time he saw me

working on the van was our next door neighbor Jerry Card. He handed me many screws and the glue gun probably hundreds of times during that year of the vans transformation. Every part had to be glued and screwed. I am sure that Jerry remembers the day I told him to put a new tube of glue in the glue gun and hand it to me. He did put the tube into the gun, cut the top off but did not punch the hole in the tubes nozzle. When I looked up he was squeezing the trigger on that gun as hard as he could. The tube burst and he was covered with that sticky glue. We both laughed as he said, "I better go home and change clothes." In 15 minutes he was back still laughing.

We did have a steady stream of people who would stop by to see what was going on with this, what looked like an over grown UPS van. In the picture [shown in last week's bulletin] you can see Don's parents who came to see the progress being made on their children's new home.

After Don and Vivian returned to Peru we kept in contact through a Ham Radio Operator in Canton, PA. He would contact Don at a certain time of the week and then call me allowing us to talk to each other through his ham radio. That was many years before the cell phone.

In fact, 15 years before that time when Gordon Hay was South Apalachin's pastor there was the old crank wall phone in the old parsonage, and we did not even have a phone where we lived up in Waits, the place I call in my book: "Way out in the Middle of Nowhere", oh how communications have changed.

A major problem in the transformation of that van into a home was how to get all of the necessities of life into such a small space. (Approximately 200 sq. feet including the engine compartment). How to have space for a stove, large refrigerator, table that served also as a bed, a bunk, bath with sink, toilet and shower. Also closets for clothes, stack pack washer and dryer, furnace, fresh water tank, water heater, a 200 lb. generator, converter and inverter, com-pressor water pump, gas bottles for stove and water heater, battery compartment for 12 volt batteries, drawers for clothing, and tools etc.

To have enough fresh water capacity we had to mount a 40 gallon tank outside on the left rear of the van. If you want to see evidence of that water tank look at the dent on the fascia part way up on the right rake of the parsonage garage. It's been there for 45 years. Some dumb driver forgot that tank was there and backed that van back too



far. Probably the same dumb driver that backed his car into the pillars that hold up the car port. You can ask Pastor Dan or Dennis Corson who that was.

The big day finally came. The van's transformation was complete. It was now a home. Don had made all the arrangements to have it shipped from the dock in Brooklyn to Peru. All someone had to do now was get that transformed van to the docks in Brooklyn.

In all actuality at the other end there was looming the possibility of a bigger problem. That was the tariff Don would have to pay to the Peruvian government to get it into the country once it arrived there. It could amount to as much as 100% of its value. But what was its value in dollars? How was that to be figured? Don knew what he had paid for the van. Nearly everything else was donated. (We are talking about the whole list of things that were previously mentioned that were paid for by the church and individuals.) How about the labor? It was 100% free gratis. Must it be counted into the value of the van now a motor home? We came up with an estimated value of nearly \$20,000. To put that into perspective that is between \$65 and \$75 thousand in today's money. But in the end that all didn't really matter as the Peruvian officials would give their estimated value and the percent of tariff.



All that was in our prayer of dedication of the motor home as the whole church gathered outside the church after the Sunday morning service. The next day we would be heading for the docks in Brooklyn. The thought of the Bonds having to pay for the van and its contents all over again in order to retrieve it when it arrived in Peru was unthinkable. We just prayed God would work in the hearts of the ones responsible for determining the

tariff when it arrived there. God did answer our prayers and the Bonds had their new home at a very low tariff.

God would use that converted van to carry the Bonds up into the Andes Mountains to fulfill the great commission of "Go and make disciples of all nations", just as he used that river boat on the Amazon in previous years to do the same thing.

Just 3 days ago [written April 1st] over in Sebring, Florida in the assisted care facility of Maranatha Village, Don told us of the local churches that God started up there in those mountains through the preaching of His Word some 40 plus years ago reproducing more local churches (more disciples for our LORD.)



I am humbled to think we (South Apalachin) had a part in all that God did through the Bonds all those years ago. That's eternal work!

Footnote: To Gary Drost: As I sat there with Don and Viv I had the same admiration for them that you expressed a short time ago for Dr. Seymour. When I told the story of Don and Vivian Bond to my Pastor down here in Florida, he made this statement: "It must be very gratifying to them to spend their last days knowing God has used their ministry of his WORD to bring all those people there in Peru unto Himself."

My thoughts in response to my Pastor's words is the old hymn that we use to sing in the church where I grew up. And here are the words:

Must I go and empty handed,
Thus my dear Redeemer meet?
Not one day of service give Him,

Lay no trophy at His feet?
Not at death I shrink or falter,
For my Savior saves me now,
But to meet Him empty handed,
Thought of that now clouds my brow."

Besides the Bonds motor home there were other major projects the church was involved in during those early years we were there as pastor:

- The New Parsonage
- Money to Rebuild
- A Tractor and Motor Cycle for the Thomases, missionaries to Africa
- An Airplane Engine for the Kings in Alaska
- Barrels packed with canned food for the Thomases
- Ladies Missionary making and packing materials for the Seymours in the Chad
- Materials for Mt. Echo Bible Institute in western New York
- The Church Library
- Work at El Rancho de Paz
- And many more.

These were all good things that transpired during the transformation years but they were not the vital things that were taking place. That was what God was doing in individual lives through the preaching and teaching of His Word from the pulpit, in Sunday School classes, Bible Studies and by parents to their children. Two things gaining in preeminence were in the church. One, the Bible being taught as Revelation to know God and Jesus Christ as the Head of His Body, The Church including this local Church at South Apalachin.

He was transforming our lives which is what redemption and His great salvation which is in Jesus Christ is all about, not just a time place experience in the past that gives us the hope of eternal life in the future, but rather an eternal living, giving relationship with God NOW.

I don't know how to explain this transformation South Apalachin Baptist Church was going through without explaining several past events involving myself that led up to that time from 1968 forward. My fear in doing this will sound like I am taking credit for something only God could do and that is grant forgiveness of sin and regenerate to impart new life to us guilty self-centered dead sinners, making this transformation period for South Apalachin Baptist Church a reality.

Firstly, I was coming back to pastor the church that licensed me to preach, ordained me, and supported me in the ministry to which God had called me at that time some 14 years before.

Secondly, I had changed during those years, (maybe it would be more correct to say “God Had changed me”) and so had the South Apalachin Baptist Church changed over those years, especially over the year or so before I came as South Apalachin pastor.

Explanation of that statement:

Fifteen years’ experience of tending two flocks of God’s sheep had taught me that what I had been taught by a professor who had been a pastor for many years really worked. Hear the words of Dr. Lowe to us students at Practical Bible School many years before that time: “Preach the Word, always holding up the Lovely Lord Jesus and the Old Rugged Cross and let God draw His own to Himself”. I had been doing that for the previous ten years in Trumansburg and saw the results spoken of on the back cover of my book; *God is Busy Fixing Things* shown there.

God is Busy Fixing Things

How do I know this? I’ve been one of his co-workers for more than fifty years. I’ve been one with Him in building His church. I’ve been one with Him in uniting disciples. I’ve been one with Him in building homes. I’ve been one with him in uniting brothers and sisters in Christ. I’ve been one with Him in restoring sinning brothers and rebuilding shattered relationships.

Summing everything together, I have been and still am one with Him fixing that which got broken in Genesis three. Namely, His crowning creation; mankind, you and me.

Only He can fix us. He fixes us one at a time. He always does His fixing in a vital way, through His Living Word by His Spirit.

As one of His co-workers, my part is to prayerfully use His tools (His Word, His Cross, His Gifts) in total dependence upon His Spirit to fix people on the inside. When He does and continues to do His work of fixing (regenerating and sanctifying) broken people, I get my reward in seeing transformed lives and homes like you will read about in this book.

As He imparts life to the dead and they continue to grow:

The proud become humble.

The covetous become generous.

The angry become meek.

The bitter become sweet.
The divided become united.
The self-centered become God-centered.
As Adam's image is erased, Christ's image takes its place.

As I said, South Apalachin Church had also changed during the fourteen years between the year I was ordained (1954) and the year I was called to be the church pastor in 1968.

The most obvious change was that the church's meeting house was no longer the little white building on the north side of South Apalachin Road but a beautiful brick building across the creek several hundred feet to the south.

Another change was the size increase in church attendance during these years. Both of those changes were good changes. But the change that was not good was what had happened in the hearts and lives of those who regularly met in that lovely new building. As I said, there were definitely more of them than when I was ordained in the old white church building across the creek fourteen years earlier, but they were a divided body.

Love for Jesus Christ and one another was in short supply. I knew this before I came to preach in the fall of 68. In fact, that was the reason I agreed to come and speak for two Sundays that fall. As they were looking for a pastor, I preached both Sundays on the subject *The God Commissioned Shepherd*, his qualifications, his character, his message, and his ministry taken from the Pastoral Epistles of I & II Timothy and Titus. I told them that if they were a flock of His sheep, this is the kind of shepherd (pastor) they should be looking for. Little did I realize that in a matter of three months I would be that pastor (shepherd) for which I told them to seek.

Unity and oneness were sadly lacking in this church body. **Love** which is the only thing which is strong enough to produce and maintain unity and harmony in any family was, as I said earlier, in short supply. Yes, I said "family" for that is what a Biblical church is: GOD's FAMILY, CHRIST'S Body, THE HOLY SPIRIT'S TEMPLE. Few people in the church were thinking of the church as a family of brothers and sisters **vitaly** united to one another. In most minds the church was an organization of individuals with little concern for each other's spiritual warfare.

Clearly many saw themselves only as members of an organization, not God's born again children, brothers and sisters in God's family that He says would be recognized by their love for one another. Through the preaching and teaching of God's Word and the years I saw God transform most of those who made those statements into loving children in God's family.

There are people in this world that Jesus Christ calls "His Disciples". He said they would be recognized by their unity and "love for one another." At least that is what He said about His disciples just before He went to the cross. It was for that unity and oneness for which He prayed that same night. He also knew that unity was not a reality among the twelve who were with Him the entire day and evening long into the night. Judas was the traitor who dipped with Him in the dish. The others were arguing about who was the greatest in the kingdom. Peter, James and John could not even stay awake and pray for one hour. Eventually they all forsook Him and fled. It was out of these sinful, self-seeking men that He would begin to build His Church. And He also gave them a living example of how they were to begin, as He took the towel and basin of water and washed His disciple's feet followed by these words: "Know you what I have done to you? You call me Master and Lord: and you say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master has washed your feet; you ought also to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord; neither, he that is sent greater than he that has sent him. If you know these things, happy are you if you do them."

John 13:12-17

Throughout the New Testament we are going to find two words that are in this passage of Scripture over and over again. They are the words "one another". Most times they are referring to those who are members of Christ's Body, the Church (one body, all vitally connected to one another and all connected to the Head of the Body who is Jesus Christ.

What does all this have to do with South Apalachin Baptist Church's transformation? Just this, in the early 1970s as we (a body of redeemed repentant believing sinners) began to grow in grace and knowledge of the Head Jesus Christ, were being transformed from a body like the Corinthian church into a body more like the Philippian church. Read and study these two letters.