

“I understand about indecision. I don’t care if I get behind. People livin’ in competition; All I want is to have my peace of mind.” If you’re a classic rock fan, you’ll instantly recognize these lyrics from the chorus of the hit song “Peace of Mind” sung by a fairly well known group called Boston. But what you might not know, however, is the story behind those lyrics.

Founder and lead guitarist Tom Scholz, an MIT grad, was working as a senior engineer for Polaroid while he was putting the band together. As he plugged away at his day job, Scholz noticed that a lot of people around him were “climbing to the top of the corporate ladder” but didn’t realize that they had propped that ladder against the wrong building. Scholz wanted more than the predictability of corporate life. He wanted “peace of mind,” and his song soars with hope, urging his listeners to “take a hard look ahead” to something better.

More than 40 years later, plenty of people still resonate with Scholz’s lyrics. We’re all looking for some peace of mind, and in a world where conflict and hopelessness seem to hit us like an epidemic, where people are “livin’ in competition” for attention, success and even for just the basics of life, finding a real peace of mind can seem pretty obscure and elusive.

So what does having a real peace of mind look like anyway, especially considering the fact that our sins can distort our concept of peace and can cause us either focus on our past mistakes, or to worry about the future? Biblically speaking, achieving a real peace of mind doesn’t come to us from being mindfully aware of ourselves, but rather from standing on the promises of God, someone who can actually do something about removing the barriers in our lives that keep us from finding real peace.

More than likely many of you watching this worship video probably recognize, or have heard, the words written in our Second lesson for today. What you may not know is that the Apostle Paul’s life was pretty brutal and filled with

all kinds of tragic circumstances: from shipwrecks, to being tortured, from having a thorn in his side, to being struck by blindness. And while Paul had climbed to the top of the ladder in his former life, before his encounter with Christ, he understood that attaining a real peace of mind begins with an intimate knowledge of God more than of oneself. In fact his letter to the Roman church reveals an intricate understanding of the human condition, and it also provides us with a solution.

In our reading for today Paul begins to lay out what he believes to be the lasting path to peace; peace that is the result of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. First, Paul talks about **peace with God** as the foundation for peace in general — the key word being the word **with**, meaning that peace is first found with God. Paul begins by saying, “Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand.” In other words, when we put our faith, allegiance, and trust in Jesus; and in what God has done for us through him, we have peace with God. God’s grace has been extended to us in Jesus, who died for our sins.

This is what we Christians understand as justification; and the essential meaning of justification is that we exist now “as though we had not sinned.” This is possible because the sinless life of Christ has been ascribed to us. God sees us as righteous and therefore, God has no gripe or grievance with us. We have peace with God, and God has peace with us. All thanks to our divine and sacrificial savior Jesus!

Imagine for a moment that you have committed a crime, but so far the authorities have not caught on to you. But to escape detection, you need to move around a lot. You create false identities. You use aliases. You are always looking over your shoulder. You have no peace with the law, and the law has a rap sheet as long as your arm against you. But then, magically, it all goes away. Perhaps the

law nabs the wrong man. Or perhaps the evidence room is destroyed in a fire. Or charges cannot be brought against you. Whatever the case may be, just imagine that something's happened, and now you don't need to run anymore. You don't need to worry about getting caught. Seriously, how good would that feel?

Pretty good! Awesome, in fact, and that is what Paul's was saying to the church in Rome and to us. The law is satisfied. The All-Points Bulletin has been withdrawn. Our slates have been wiped clean. We have been given a fresh start. We are in a state of peace with God, and God is no longer demanding justice. Justice has been rendered.

Without that foundational peace *with* God, it's virtually impossible for us to have any other kind of peace. If we were to look at the primary reason our world and our society are not at peace, this would be the root cause — people are not at peace with God; indeed, they seem to be warring against God. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel described ancient Israel before the exile in this way. Just as today, people in the days of the prophets were walking around crying out, "Peace! Peace!" But there is no peace apart from peace with God, and therefore people are still enslaved to sin, still racked with doubt and fear, still wandering aimlessly searching for peace they can never find.

But if we have peace with God, Paul says that we are then able to live with a new kind of peace: *the* peace **of God** — the key word being "of" which is the second way of peace. After Paul says we have peace with God, he goes on to say that "we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

Having Peace *with* God leads us to the peace *of God*, and that is a peace that produces an actual peace of mind within us. We can have freedom from anxiety

and panic because God is present with us through the Holy Spirit. It's not a peace that is dependent on our circumstances, but it is a peace based on a faith that God is at work in us and is caring for us always. We can have joy and peace when it matters most, especially when we are in the midst of trying times. It's this kind of inner peace that makes us a resilient people, and that makes us stand out in contrast to an anxious world.

People who have this kind of peace are attractive to others because, let's face it, most human beings want to have that kind of peace for themselves. In fact, you may know people who have endured horrific circumstances in their lives and yet someone they have a deep peace about them — people who have experienced loss, grave illness, or unfair treatment, and yet they still have peace.

People who are at peace **with God**, and have the peace **of God**, tend to be non-anxious; they don't panic when life gets hard; they don't react negatively when circumstances don't go their way. Rather, they worry less; they endure suffering with grace; and, as a result, have strength of character and hope for the future. It's not about simply pretending things are okay or "faking it 'til you make it," but it's about an inner peace given to us by the Spirit's presence. As Paul declares to the Philippians: "The peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

But finding the peace of God is not the end goal. Peace always comes to us on its way to someone else. When Jesus sent out his disciples to spread the good news, he told them to greet everyone with "Peace to this house." Peace was not just something for them to have as an inner feeling, but something to be extended to others. Later in his letter to the Romans, Paul points out that: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." When we have peace **with God**, we also receive the peace **of God**, but that should also lead us to become **the peacemakers of God**.

As disciples of Christ we are called to extend God's peace to others, and that is a vital part of our life as His disciples. Sharing God's peace with others is essential and important to the mission that God has invited us into, and is actually the third way of peace.....Which begs the question what might that kind of peace look like? We get a clue about what living "peaceably with others" looks like toward the end of Paul's letter to the Romans when he talks about people of peace acting peaceably.

*They show genuine love to others. They hate evil and hold fast to what is good. They serve one another in mutual affection and show honor to one another. They are enthusiastic, serving the Lord with the fire of the Spirit. People of peace are not the "frozen chosen" but are genuinely excited about serving and doing the work of the Lord. They have hope no matter the circumstance, they are patient in suffering, and fervent in prayer.

They contribute to the needs of the saints and show hospitality to strangers. They are able to bless their persecutors instead of cursing them. They are empathic, rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep.

In the end, though, it all comes down to the fact that finding peace with God leads us to the peace of God, which leads us to the act of peacemaking by the power of God. And with that kind of peace, we can change the world! Amen.