

Do you wish you could have been there? Do you wish you could have heard the wind? Do you wish you could have looked across the table and see the smile slowly slide onto Peter's face as he realized what was going on? The Holy Spirit was there in about the most visible way he is ever seen in the entire bottle, and what happens next is just outrageous, isn't it? Like the hilarity of what was going on... I don't know if I could even handle it. Guys who have known and only spoken one language their entire life, suddenly speaking in every language you could imagine to a multicultural crowd who could understand every word. And then 3,000 people became Christians! Amazing, right? What an experience!

But there's something a little wrong with what happened next. Oh, I'm not talking about that day, I'm talking in the years afterwards. Churches and church bodies got obsessed with what happened on Pentecost to the point where they tried to make every Sunday and really every day like Pentecost. And can you really blame them? How many of us would say no if God offered us the chance to speak in different languages so we could reach out to thousands of people at a time?

It's not uncommon for us to have that desire. I mean, we just sang a song at the beginning of the service called, "Start a Fire." Why? Because fires are powerful and a little bit dangerous and unpredictable. Man, how cool would it be if all that almighty power that God had stored up would just be poured out all over the church and our land. What amazing things could happen! Why can't the church just be powered by rocket fuel?

Sometimes it feels like we're just using plain old gasoline, doesn't it? Amazing things like speaking in tongues don't happen anymore. People aren't brought to faith by the thousands anymore. And I'll be honest, it can get a little depressing. Yup, every week we begin in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yup, every so often we get to see some baptisms. Yup, there are new people coming to our church, but I mean, not as many as we hope someday. It can feel like the church is just trudging along with some old dirty gasoline that barely keeps the car running.

But here's the truth, the church has been using rocket fuel every day since that day of Pentecost a couple thousand years ago, and it isn't stopping any time soon. You just have to know what to look for.

When Paul wrote Romans, he wanted the Roman Christians to understand the power that was contained in the message of the gospel. That's why he started his letter to them by writing in chapter 1 that the gospel is the power of God for salvation, and if you follow his argument, you see why. Through chapters 2 and 3, Paul breaks down every one of us to our elemental core, stripping away every excuse and futile attempt to be perfect and leaves us lying on our backs beat up. He writes in chapter 3, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That's it. No matter how good you think you are, no matter how much rational you have stored up for the way you've acted, no matter how many secrets you keep, or how many people you've convinced that you're a good person, you're not. You're not perfect, and that has never been good enough and it never will.

But then Paul lights one candle in the dark that grows for the rest of the book... The good news that for sinners like us, there is forgiveness and a chance to get right with God again. And we encounter his writing today in the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter of his letter where he is about to explain how you get this forgiveness, and how powerful the forgiveness actually is. So, let's take a look at what he says...

**“What shall we say then?”** Well, Paul is obviously looking back at something. Here, he's looking back at chapter 5 where he just said this absolutely ridiculous statement. **“where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.”** He is basically asserting that no matter how much you've sinned, like seriously, pick a number... There's grace to cover that sin as well! That's rocket fuel, friends, and we could preach a whole sermon on that, but that's not the section we're talking about today. When Paul writes **“What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may abound? By no means!”** he's really tackling the claim that some people make about grace.

See, there are very well meaning people in the church who believe that if you don't tell people how to live, they will just keep going on sinning. They would say, if grace is too free, then people will just take it as a blank check to sin as much as they want. So, they preach grace, but temper it enough with “ways to live” or “Godly instructions” so you don't think you have a free ride.

Sometimes we do it to ourselves as well. We think, ok, so I believe this whole forgiveness of sins thing, and I believe that it comes from Jesus. Now, I want to grow in my new found spiritual life, so, what do I have to do? I guess I should start acting like a Christian... Quit drinking so much, and treat other people like I want to be treated, and help out at a soup kitchen or something like that.

When we go down that path, we can start doing it to baptism too. If we just give this newborn child baptism, they'll go through their life sinning whenever they want! We should wait until they can understand it. Or we might think, if you're an adult, the only time you should be baptized is when you have already become a Christian, that way you know to live like a Christian once you're baptized. Or, and I think this is the worst, some people actually turn baptism into something they do for God. If I'm a Christian, I will go get baptized to show God how committed I am to him.

Brothers and sisters, these are all sinful, and here's why. It is our natural human tendency to think that Grace is too dangerous. We are afraid that if we don't make rules, people won't know what to do with the grace that they receive from God. Maybe, just maybe, the reason we feel like we're just using boring ol' gasoline is because we take away the power of the rocket fuel of grace.

Now, yes, if you think that forgiveness is a blank check to just keep on doing whatever you want, just cut it out! Stop it! But here's where he turns on the rocket fuel-powered afterburners... He writes, **“We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”**

Interesting that he doesn't say that we who have been baptized have been baptized into Jesus life first, right? It seems like that would make more sense. Because we're

baptized, we are new people with a new direction and a new purpose, and he gets there eventually, but first he says we are baptized into death...

He says it because something very important has to happen before we live a new life...we need to die, and baptism kills us.

When you honestly read God's law and understand that God doesn't just say, "Don't be a deadbeat dad," but says, "Be the sacrificial savior of your family," or that God doesn't say, "Just don't have sex with someone you're not married to," but says, "Porn is sin, and one look of lust is sin, and even if you are married, you're not free from sexual sin," or that God doesn't just say, "Help your neighbors," but says, "Everything you do must be serving God or serving someone else," you can't help, but be completely aware that who you are is not good enough. And, I'm going to say something that might seem controversial at first... Even though a YouTube video might have told you are you're beautiful and worthwhile because God created you, that's simply not true. Even if some preacher told you that you were born to be God's warrior in the world, that's also not true. When you were born, the Bible says in Ephesians 2,

**"Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath."**

Here me when I say this, when you were born, you weren't beautiful or powerful in God's eyes... You were helpless. But against all odds and logic, God still decided to do something miraculous, but even though it was miraculous, it wasn't going to be easy. If you are going to live a new life, the life you lived needed to end, and here's how God did it.

You know the hymn, "In Christ Alone?" You remember that one line, "Then on the cross when Jesus died, the wrath of God was satisfied?" Friends, you needed to die, that was the only thing that could appease God's anger at our sin, but remember what Paul wrote... **"all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death."** On the cross, when Jesus died, who you were died with Christ.

It's like the most awesome divine piggy back ride ever! Did you ever give or receive piggy back rides when you were young. I always asked my dad for piggy back or rides on his shoulders when wherever we were walking got particularly difficult. Jesus took us on a divine piggy back ride through death! And he connects us to that rocket fuel through baptism.

So, go back to that first Pentecost day. The tongues of fire and all... Pretty amazing. A lot of people would say that comparatively, Baptism isn't so amazing. But it is mind boggling. Through water and the power of God's Word, he creates a connection between the rocket fuel of Christ on the cross and you, a spiritually helpless person. Because of your baptism, you don't have to die in sin. You get to go straight to heaven.

Oh, and remember how sometimes we're a little intimidated by how dangerous grace is? Brothers and sisters, it's time to let that dog out of its cage. God promises that where grace is preached and where grace is given through baptism, there is power that you can't even understand, that you can't even control. God promises that where his gospel is preached, lives will be changed, but you don't have to change them! Just think about Paul's argument for a while...

Where sin increases, Grace increases. It increases because where sin attacks, Christ has already died and risen again carrying you the whole way. Therefore, you are alive with a

new life in Christ. See, nothing about having to live a certain way, just God's free promise to love you always.

Now, when you can't help yourself but ask, "If God has given me a new life, what on earth can I do with this new life?" Then Paul has some helpful pointers, but what he wants you to know about baptism is that it is rocket fuel. It is untamable power from God to kill and to raise to life. And here's what that untamable power does...

**"4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. 5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—7 because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. 9 For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. 10 The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. 11 In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. 12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. 13 Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness. 14 For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace."**

And before we end today, just drink in that last phrase. Because we are baptized, we are under grace. We wake up every with something better than a clean slate. If we had a clean slate, we'd definitely fill it up daily. Living in the grace of your baptism means there is no slate anymore. God's not keeping score. The death he died, he died once for all. And all of its power is yours through baptism. Let that grace be the rocket fuel that powers your life. Amen.