



Paul's Epistle to the Galatians

Chapter 3, Verses 1-14

by Tim Kelley

Paul had shown the delegation from Jerusalem that he was emphatically opposed to the notion that “salvation” was dependant on being a member of a specific group, people or race, and that those who would require any type of traditional conversion process outside of what’s stipulated in Torah were clearly wrong – even if that person was Peter himself.

The Galatians had accepted a new, or maybe it was an old, twist on the Gospel message that Paul had been given by Yeshua. It was clear to Paul that non-Jews, specifically non-Jewish Israelites, did not have to convert to Judaism in order to take part in the covenant promises and thus take part in the Gospel message – that is – the restoration of God’s people Israel. Now he goes on to show that the Galatians that righteousness does not come by obedience to the law, neither the Torah nor the traditional “oral” law. Instead, it comes by faith and trust in the promises of God, and their fulfillment by His son - Messiah Yeshua.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:1** O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified.

It’s become apparent that the perpetrators of the “other” gospel had convinced the Galatians that faith in God and His promises was not enough to bring them back into the fold of Israel. From Paul’s previous remarks (Gal. 2:3) it’s clear they wanted those who were returning to God to be circumcised, or more correctly “re-circumcised” according to the Jewish formula for a proselyte who wanted to convert to Judaism. In their mind, if you were not Jewish, you had no place in the kingdom of God, and in fact (based on Peter’s actions) – if you were not Jewish, you were still a heathen.

Paul can’t understand it. What had gotten into those “foolish Galatians”? How could they turn so quickly? It’s as if someone had cast a spell on them, so he sets out to show them that their calling didn’t come by Torah obedience, but by faith in the promise . . . the same promise given to Abraham.

It appears that Paul had rehearsed with them the story of Yeshua’s sacrifice many times over. The evidence that He had come, that His message was that of redemption of His people, and that He had died in order to bring that redemption about. The KJV says that the Yeshua’s death at the stake was “evidently set forth”. The ESV says “publicly portrayed as crucified”. It’s as if Paul had been there, and there’s no reason to believe that he had not, and thus he was able to paint a very vivid picture. But the crucifixion story is not all that Paul taught. It’s implied that he connected the death of the Messiah to their redemption and their ability to be a part of the covenant, as we’ll see later (vs. 14).

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:2-3** Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?

What does it mean “receive the Spirit”? Understanding this fundamental to understanding the rest of what Paul is saying. Does “receive the Spirit” mean that you are saved? Does the spirit being in you indicate that you have arrived? Or is “receiving the spirit “ simply an indication that God is beginning to work with you? For a quick understanding of how the believing Jews looked at this very important point, we can see how the apostles reacted to the situation with Cornelius.

Looking back at that pivotal event . . .

Cornelius was a Roman soldier – a gentile, yet a believer in the God of Israel. God sent Peter to Corneleus to teach him about Messiah Yeshua. Corneleus believed the words of Peter, and while Peter was still preaching, the Holy Spirit, in a recognizable way, fell on Corneleus and all his household¹. The believing Jews who had accompanied Peter told Peter “we need to go ahead and baptize them”, which is a Jewish way of saying, “we need to accept them as full-fledged Jews”. When rehearsing these events back to his Jewish friends, Peter recounts the words the angel said to Cornelius –

^{NKJ} **Acts 11:13-14** ". . . Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon whose surname is Peter, who will tell you words by which you and all your household will be saved²."

Peter was in fact, telling his friends that salvation was available to the Gentiles, just as it was to the Jews. When they heard it, the glorified God saying -

^{ESV} **Acts 11:18** . . . "Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life."

So the Jews, especially the believing Jews, understood that with the coming of The Spirit upon a person, God had 1) granted repentance to life, 2) had redeemed them, and 3) had opened to them the doors to salvation, which the Jews understood to mean “having a place in the Kingdom of God. In effect, they had become the people of God³.

So Paul asks the believers in Galatia, people upon whom the Holy Spirit had obviously fallen, this question; “If the Holy Spirit came upon you without a conversion to Judaism (just as it did Corneleus), what makes you think you now have to be converted to Judaism in order to be a part of the people of God?” This obviously is a rhetorical question . . . He knows the answer . . . and they do too. No one had ever been redeemed because they kept the Torah. The Israelites were redeemed by taking a lamb, slaughtering it, and putting it's blood on their doorpost. It was weeks later that they made it to Sinai where they received the Torah. So, did the Torah deliver them from Egypt or was it YHVH? Was it their works, or was it faith in the words that came from Moses, their deliverer? Paul's question is still being asked today . . . “Are we redeemed by faith, or by works?”

The answer is quite obvious. The Galatians were redeemed by faith - answering a call . . . God had put His Spirit in them. They didn't just wake up one morning and decide they were going stop playing with idols. It wasn't their idea to check out this “Torah” thing. Instead, they answered a call that God had promised he'd make 1500 years earlier when, on the eastern side of the Jordan River, Moses stated –

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 30:4-6** "If *any* of you are driven out to the farthest *parts* under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. ⁵ "Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. ⁶ "**And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart** and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live . . ."

The Galatians were being called back. It was God who was gathering them, they didn't come on their own. He was the one that began a work in them. This is quite clear.

But what does Paul mean “are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” Is Paul saying that that Torah observance - the natural step for a person being drawn to God - is the wrong path for them to follow? Not at all! If we continue on with the passage in Deuteronomy 30, we see that a result of being called back IS Torah observance –

¹ Acts 10:43

² Strong's 4982 sozo {sode'-zo} to save, keep safe and sound, to rescue from danger or destruction

³ This is not to say that they had “arrived”. All the Israelites who came out of Egypt were the “people of God” as well, but most of them died in the wilderness, never making it to the Promised Land

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 30:7-10** "Also the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. ⁸ **"And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today.** ⁹ "The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, ¹⁰ "if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, *and* if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Paul obviously not saying "are you being made perfect by the law". He's asking a very literal question. If you became the people of God by the Spirit of God coming upon you, why do you think you need to go through the Jewish circumcision ritual in order to remain a part of the people of God? Another way of saying it could be; "If you believe that your calling was by the spirit (something from God and not your own doing), do you now believe that you can only obtain a place in the Kingdom **by** your own doing, i.e. becoming Jewish?"

One more point in this regards is that many of the Jewish people believed that simply being Jewish guaranteed them a place in the Kingdom. This may be way Paul used the term "made perfect" which in Greek implies "you've arrived".

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:4-5** Did you suffer so many things in vain- if indeed it was in vain? ⁵ Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith-

To begin, let's look at this word "suffered". It's from the Greek word "pascho" (Strong's 3958) and it simply means "to be affected or have been affected, to feel, have a sensible experience, to undergo". According to Tim Hegg⁴, the English word "suffer" has changed meaning over the years. In the middle ages, it simply meant to have an experience, either good or bad. Today, it's drifted over the being simply a bad experience. A better translation of the Greek word "pascho" would be "experience". Thus verse 4 could read "Did you experience so many things in vain . . ."

The Galatians, along with others who were being called back at that time, witnessed numerous miracles as the apostles tried to show them that YHVH was beginning to redeem them, just as He had done 1500 years earlier when they were captives in Egypt. Paul was asking if all those miracles were wasted on them, or if they – like ancient Israel – believed that their deliverer was indeed able to save them and restore them as His people. As with Moses, the purpose of the signs was not to make Paul and the other apostles look like some great prophet, instead they were to substantiate the message that they were to deliver.

Yeshua told His disciples on the evening He was betrayed –

^{ESV} **John 14:11** ". . . believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves.

Yeshua had spent better than three years doing the work of His father, preparing witnesses who would carry the message of the Messiah, the deliverer of Israel, to the nations. He never expected them to simply believe that He was indeed Israel's long-sought Messiah, instead He backed up his claims with miracles, just as God backed up Moses' claims with miracles. He wanted His disciples to believe His words, but He understood that he various healings and restoring of life to those who had died was probably the evidence that would compel them to believe what He had said.

⁴ Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Commentary by Tim Hegg,, TorahResource, 2002, updated 2010, pg. 105

And so it was with the disciples, they would have similar power to perform miracles as well for the purpose of substantiating their message.

^{ESV} **Mark 16:20** And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by accompanying signs.

This is the way God does things . . . he sends out a prophet with a message and supports that message with signs. Just look a few of the examples⁵ –

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 4:34** Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by **signs**, by **wonders**, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?

^{NKJ} **Acts 2:43** Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.

^{NKJ} **Acts 14:1** Now it happened in Iconium that they went together to the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke that a great multitude both of the Jews and of the Greeks believed. ² But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brethren. ³ Therefore they stayed there a long time, speaking boldly in the Lord, who was bearing witness to the word of His grace, granting signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

^{NKJ} **Romans 15:18-19** ¹⁸ For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient -- ¹⁹ in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.

^{NKJ} **Hebrews 2:1** Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ² For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard *Him*, ⁴ God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?

Again, Paul was in effect asking them; “. . . did all these signs happen because of what you did, i.e. your obedience to the Torah or a Jewish tradition?” As we've seen above, the signs were always given to help you believe, not because of what you had done! Signs were always given to bolster faith, and works come as a result of faith.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:6-7** just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? ⁷ Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham.

In the previous two chapters of his letter, Paul had defended the gospel message that Yeshua had personally delivered to him (1:7 – 2:10), and had even railed against Peter for his gross error in Antioch (2:11 – 2:21). Now he was ready to show the Galatians, by the scripture, that salvation never came to Israel because of what they had done (that is, by the Torah), but that the true sons of Abraham live by faith – just as Abraham did. Faith in the promise is what makes you a child of Abraham, not works, and certainly not tradition. We must not forget . . . Abraham had yet to be circumcised when it was said of him “and it was counted to him as righteousness”. Young's Literal Translation makes Paul's statement even more clear –

⁵ See also Det 6:22; Deut. 7:19; Deut 26:8; Deut 34:11; Neh. 9:10

^{YLT} **Galatians 3:7** know ye, then, that those of faith -- these are sons of Abraham,

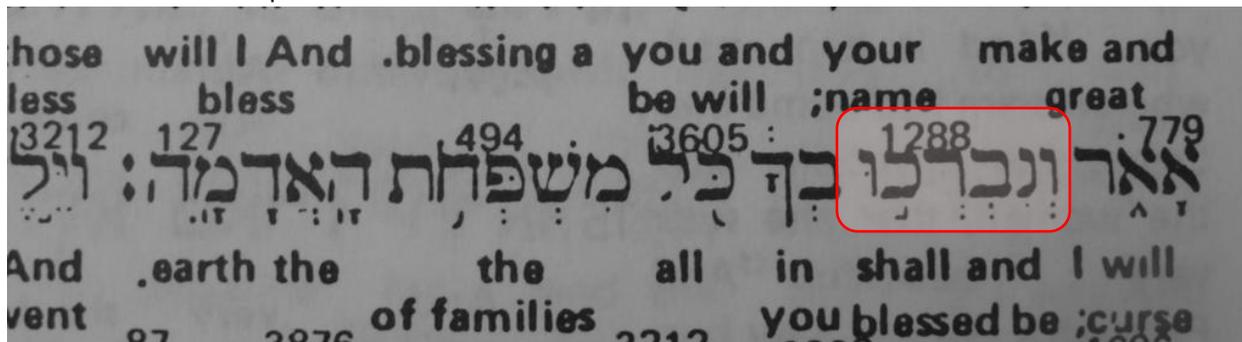
^{ESV} **Galatians 3:8-9** And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

In these two verses, Paul does a midrash on Genesis 12:3 by alluding to a little known Hebrew word that's found embedded in the text; and that Hebrew word does in fact show how the gospel (as was being taught by Paul) would indeed come to pass.

Genesis 12:3 is a favorite verse of many in the Messianic movement. I suspect it's the driving force behind the current "love for Israel" thing that many Christians have grabbed hold of these past 20 or so years. But unfortunately, it's often mis-understood by those same Christians because they continue to look at themselves as being Gentiles instead of what Paul clearly shows in Galatians 3:29. So instead of realizing that they themselves are supposed to be a blessing, they tend to believe that they can in some way be blessed by blessing or doing something for Israel, usually in the form of sending money.

So what is this word that God laid in the scripture, and what does it mean? Before we can understand it's meaning and implication, we must again solidify in our mind what Paul's gospel message is. It's quite simply the message of the prophets, the good news that they almost always proclaimed after their prophecies of the dire consequences of Israel's sins, and that is "God will send a redeemer for the outcasts of Israel, and they will be drawn back to God, and once again become a people". But not only that, when Israel is drawn back, they will draw the gentiles with them.

So if you have an interlinear Bible of Genesis, turn to Genesis and 12:3. Unless you can read the Hebrew, it won't make much sense to you, so you'll have to trust me, but on the side that has both the Hebrew and English text, locate the words "and earth the the all in shall and I will . . ." Once you find those words, look for the Hebrew word with the Strong's number 1288 above it. It should look similar to the outlined text in the picture below.



Now, before going any further, turn to your Strong's Concordance and see what word is associated with Strong's #1288. Chances are it will be the Hebrew word "barak" (בָּרַךְ). But "barak" is obviously not the word in the Hebrew text. Instead, it's the Hebrew word "v'nivrecuh". Now, imbedded in "v'nivrecuh" is the word "barak", and thus it has the connotation of "blessed", but "v'nivrecuh" actually means "mixed"⁶. And this is exactly what happened. The northern tribes of Israel were cast out of the land at around 700 BC and ceased to be an identifiable people because (among other reasons) they married people who

⁶ v'nivrecuh is used only three times in the Tnakh – Gen. 2:3; 18:18; 28:14 – all passages having to do with the same promise. Other instances of the phrase "shall be blessed" use a different variation of "barak". According to some writers, this word is found in the Talmud in regards to mixing and grafting. This understanding is, of course, challenged within the Jewish community for understandable reasons, but history lends to the fact that Abraham's descendant have indeed been mixed into the races.

were not Israelites. The same holds true for the southern kingdom of Judah. Because of all the children born to these mixed marriages, the sons of Abraham became mixed into all nations.

The gospel message of the return of the tribes is rooted in a number of messianic prophecies, one of which is in Isaiah –

^{NKJ} **Isaiah 49:6** Indeed He says, "It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant To raise up the tribes of Jacob, And to restore the preserved ones of Israel; I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles, That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth."

Isaiah clearly shows that Messiah's job is to restore the preserved of Israel, but when He begins to draw Israel (as He did in the 1st century) he will also draw gentiles along with them. This is the gospel, and this is what YHVH said to Abraham. This understanding helps make verse 9 more clear, because now we see that ANYONE with faith that Messiah's shed blood did, and can, redeem His people, can become a part of the people of God, the descendants of our father Abraham.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:10** For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

In contrast to the faith of Abraham, those who attempt to bring themselves back into covenant with God by their works (either the Torah or the Oral Torah traditions) have got a problem, because Deuteronomy 27:26 clearly states that if you don't keep "all" the words of the law, you're under a curse. We all sin, and even one sin can separate you from God, so attempting to become righteous by our own works, our own Torah observance, is fruitless. We can't do it. The only way we can become righteous is the same way Abraham did . . . by faith!

In this passage, Paul lays a little insight into his understanding of the Oral Law. I don't believe Paul is against all Oral Law, but he does put it into proper perspective. Notice how he quotes this passage from Deuteronomy 27:26. He says –

"Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

But look at the Hebrew text as translated into English –

^{KJV} **Deuteronomy 27:26** Cursed *be* he that confirmeth not *all* the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen.

Notice that the word "written" is not there. Neither is it in the text of the Septuagint, the text that Paul normally quotes from.

^{LXE} **Deuteronomy 27:26** Cursed is every man that continues not in all the words of this law to do them: and all the people shall say, So be it.

You can also look at the Hebrew (Masoretic) text itself and you'll not find a Hebrew word that can be translated into the English word "written". I don't think Paul simply misquoted the scripture. Instead, I think he was making a clear statement that you are cursed if you break the written law, but not if you "break" the un-written law, i.e. – the Oral Torah! Why? Because the Oral law is simply Jewish tradition.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:11-12** Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith." ¹² But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them."

Paul now delves deeper into the prophets and quotes a prophet that came along nearly 1000 years after Moses. Habakkuk prophesied in the years leading up to the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar. He was asking God why the righteous are swept up into captivity along with the evil. This was the case for all Israel – God treats Israel as a community. But Yah shows Habakkuk that he must have faith in the promises (as he does) even though he may already be walking in Torah. This is clearly expressed in Habbakuk's opening remarks.

^{NKJ} **Habakkuk 1:2-4** ² O LORD, how long shall I cry, And You will not hear? Even cry out to You, "Violence!" And You will not save (Heb. – yasha). ³ Why do You show me iniquity, And cause *me* to see trouble? For plundering and violence *are* before me; There is strife, and contention arises. ⁴ Therefore the law (Heb. – Torah) is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; Therefore perverse judgment proceeds.

God's answer is this –

^{NKJ} **Habakkuk 2:4** " Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.

In times of trouble, all your Torah observance does not earn you God's protection, because again, one single sin convicts you to death, but instead, faith in God is what preserves you.

But Paul does not want to leave his audience believing that there's no value in the Torah. Faith has its purpose and Torah has its purpose, so after showing that salvation is by faith, he goes on to say BUT faith does not replace the Torah as is shown in Lev. 18:5 –

^{KJV} **Leviticus 18:5** Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I *am* the LORD.

And again in the Septuagint -

^{LXE} **Leviticus 18:5** So ye shall keep all my ordinances, and all my judgments, and do them; which if a man do, he shall live in them: I *am* the Lord your God.

What I believe Paul is saying here is that it's faith that delivers (saves) our life from calamity, but it's living within the framework of the Torah – the very words and mind of YHVH – that give you true life. Once you've been saved (by faith), you should now walk in Torah – the words of God. The apostle James supports this understanding when he says -

^{NKJ} **James 2:18** But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.

^{ESV} **Galatians 3:13-14** Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"- ¹⁴ so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

Paul now "gets to the point" of the previous four verses and his point is that Israel is under a curse, a curse that's prescribed by the law – the Torah. And what is that curse? It's alienation from God and His Land.

^{NKJ} **Leviticus 26:27-33** ²⁷ ' And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me . . .
³³ I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 4:25-27** ²⁵ " When you beget children and grandchildren and have grown old in the land, and act corruptly and make a carved image in the form of anything, and do evil in the sight of the LORD your God to provoke Him to anger, ²⁷ . . . the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you.

^{NKJ} **Deuteronomy 28:58-64** ⁵⁸ " If you do not carefully observe all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, THE LORD YOUR GOD, . . . then the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, which neither you nor your fathers have known -- wood and stone.

Alienation from God is the "curse of the law". To have to live outside the Hebrew culture, outside of a community of people who are walking the same direction in God's Torah, is the punishment God put upon his people. For the northern tribes of Israel, this punishment took place when the Assyrians invaded Samaria and took most of the people from the northern tribes captive and removed them from the land. Likewise, Judah was removed two hundred years later by the Babylonians, but they were allowed to return 70 years later.

During the 1st century, the northern tribes were still under the curse, but God made a way for them to begin to return when he sent His son – Messiah Yeshua – the take that curse upon Himself. So Paul does a little play on words by referring to a passage in Deuteronomy.

^{ESV} **Deuteronomy 21:22-23** "And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, ²³ his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.

This verse does not describe a person who is crucified, but instead refers to a person who is hanged by a rope or is in some other way put to death and then hung on a tree as an example to others. Hanging on a tree, or displaying a dead body on a tree is not a punishment that is prescribed in the Torah, but is more than likely a practice of the pagans that is detestable to God as is shown in the Jewish Publication Society's rendition of the same verse –

^{JPS} **Deuteronomy 21:23** his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt surely bury him the same day; for he that is hanged is a reproach unto God; that thou defile not thy land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance.

The sight of a dead and decaying body hanging out in the open is apparently loathsome to God (as it is to most people), so He wants it out of his sight, put in the ground where it belongs. Because of their idolatry, Israel had become loathsome in God's sight. He could no longer stand to see her in her idolatrous state, so He cast her out of His land.

Paul is saying that Yeshua had become loathsome to God by taking upon himself the curse that had been on Israel. His death redeemed⁷ us by paying the price of the sins of our fathers, and in so doing has enabled the tribes to return to God, which in turn made a way for the gentiles to be drawn as well, just as is shown in his "midrash" of Genesis 12:3. But we can only claim that blessing by faith, not by Torah observance. Instead, we show that we've been blessed by our Torah walk.

In effect, Paul just told us why Yeshua gave His life.

⁷ Strong's 1805 "exagorazo" - to redeem 1a) by payment of a price to recover from the power of another, to ransom, buy off