Text: I Corinthians 13:4-8a
Title: "The Spirit Way … the Way of Love" Pt.2

INTRODUCTION

Open your Bibles please to I Corinthians 13, and when you have it, would you bow your heads with me as we pray together.

Review:

1. THE <u>PRIORITY</u> OF LOVE (vv.1-3)

1 Corinthians 12:31b (NIV) - And now I will show you the most excellent way.

John 13:34-35 (NIV) – "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. [35] By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

2. THE <u>PRACTICALITIES</u> OF LOVE (vv.4-8a)

Note: Now the "Spirit Way" is the way of love.

Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness and self-control.

> We're going to see that several of the qualities of love are also included in this list. Love is the primary and overwhelming evidence that our lives are lived under the control of the Holy Spirit.
>
> **Galatians 5:6 (NIV) - The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.**

And that love is more powerfully portrayed here in written form here in I Corinthians 13 than in any other place in history. The words were originally written to a church that desperately needed to understand what love was and wasn't. But it's not just for church life. If this kind of love was expressed and experienced in every family, there would be a dramatic drop in divorce, child abuse and dysfunctional families. If this kind of love were evidenced by every disciple of Jesus, there would be a phenomenal revival as people were drawn to the love of Christ in countless numbers.

As we move through the next few verses, vv.4-8, would you imagine that the Holy Spirit is painting a portrait of love? And with each stroke of the brush stroke, the portrait becomes more complete.

> And as we read we see the various adjectives (at least in the NIV) that are used to describe love. Actually, in the original text they are not adjectives, but rather verbs. This kind of love is not merely a feeling, it is active. It is righteous involvement in the lives of other people. There are seven positives and nine negatives used to paint the picture of love for us.

1 Corinthians 13:4 (NIV) - Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.

LOVE IS <u>PATIENT</u> – When we think about patience, we generally think about being patient while the traffic light is changing, or in a long line at the grocery store. There's a reason that people in the hospitals are called "patients." It's because they spend so much time waiting … for tests, for medicine, or whatever. But the use of this particular word in the NT most often refers to patience with people … difficult people.

The word comes from the combination of two words that literally mean to be "long-tempered." When we talk about someone who is unusually temperamental, we sometimes say they have a "short fuse." If something happens that annoys them, there's going to be an explosion, probably sooner than later.

> Patience on the other hand means that when I am provoked or annoyed, I don't explode. If I pray about something that has provoked me or something that has hurt me, the Spirit will give me grace to let it go.

Now these qualities are all found in the God who, according to the Scripture, is love. God exhibits this quality of patience.

> **2 Peter 3:9 (NIV) - The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.**

We can be patient with others because God has been patient with us.

> Note: This is not something that comes naturally to us as human beings. Some pretty ugly feelings can emerge when we are wronged. Our first instinct in the flesh is retaliate when someone hurts us. But as a believer, I do not have the privilege of satisfying my need to get even. Why? Because I am indwelt by the Spirit of the One who is love.

LOVE IS <u>KIND</u> – The word means to do something good for those who do you harm. Because love is active, it's more than just biting your tongue. Love looks for a way to bless others, even those who hurt us.

> Again, this is first and foremost a quality of God.
>
> **Titus 3:4-6 (NIV) - But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, [5] he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, [6] whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,**
>
> Just think about that: God withheld His wrath toward us, and gave us a new start, and generously poured out His Spirit upon us when we received His Son Jesus. What kindness!

Look at it this way: The greatest thing that I have came from someone whom I offended and sinned against.

> **ILLUSTRATION** – Suppose someone took you into the living room of their home and showed you a priceless work of art hanging on the wall. You ask them, "Where did you get that?" They reply, "It was a gift from someone that I severely wronged." They took you out into their garage and showed you a brand new Mercedes. You ask, "Where did you get that?" They reply, "It was a gift from someone whom I hurt terribly." You'd be shocked at that, wouldn't you? But that's exactly what the kindness of God has done. The greatest thing we have came from One whom we hurt in the worst way.

ILLUSTRATION – I heard about one child who prayed, "Lord make all bad people good, and all good people nice." The little girl had come to realize that all morally good people are not "nice" or "kind." Play nice!

LOVE DOES NOT <u>ENVY</u> – Other translations of the Bible render this "love is not jealous." There's a problem with that word, because when we think of jealousy we think of jealousy of one being possessive of another's affections. And sometimes we are told that if we really love someone, we are not possessive. But the fact is when you really love someone, you don't want them sharing their affections with another person. The Bible explains that God is a jealous God.

> **Exodus 34:14 (NIV) - Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.**

So the NIV doesn't use the word "jealous," but rather the word "envy." It essentially means to covet something that someone else possesses.

> You see the love we're studying here is love that is satisfied in <u>giving</u> more than in <u>getting</u>. Rather than <u>resenting</u> when others are blessed, love <u>rejoices</u> when others are blessed.

LOVE DOES NOT <u>BOAST</u> – The picture here is of someone who is a self-promoter … someone who is always talking about themselves … their successes, their possessions, their achievements, their promotions.

> **ILLUSTRATION** – I love the story about Mohammed Ali getting on an airplane. The boxer was notorious for his constant boasting. As he took his seat the flight attendant came through the cabin and noticed that Ali didn't have his seatbelt buckled. She said, "Sir, would you please fasten your seatbelt." Ali replied, "Superman don't need no seatbelt." The quick thinking attendant said, "Yes, and Superman don't need no plane. Buckle up buddy."

Maybe some of the Corinthians were boasting about their spiritual gifts; and if so, they failed to remember that the word for spiritual gift is *charisma* … literally, a grace gift. If any good came from their gift it was due solely to the grace of God working through them.

> But pride blinds us to these things. And Paul gets to that as well.

LOVE IS NOT <u>PROUD</u> – There's nothing that is more anti-God than pride. The word in the original language means to be "puffed up." That's what pride does to us. It puffs us up, making us think that we are better than others. The middle letter in "pride" is the letter "I." And nothing could be farther from the Spirit of Christ than pride. Christ demonstrated love through humility. When we are proud, we have an inflated view of our own importance.

Pride is infatuation with our own image, importance and reputation.

> **ILLUSTRATION –** I remember reading the story of something that happened to Gail MacDonald, wife of the noted author and pastor, Gordon MacDonald. The story happened when their teenage son was going to take the test to get his driver's license. That morning, something happened and the only vehicle available for the son to take his driving test in was a pickup truck. So Gail and the son drove down to the bureau, and when they arrived they discovered that the state law required that a parent be in the car with the teen, but because it was a pickup truck, she couldn't sit in the front seat; the officer had to. She would have to sit in the bed of truck. Here she was in a dress and heels. What was she to do? Gail said, "I assumed the position. I climbed into the back of the pickup truck and did what I had to do." Reflecting on this later, Gail said, "That's just what love does. I'm not too important to do something 'undignified' to help someone that I love."

Let's go on.

1 Corinthians 13:5 (NIV) - It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.

LOVE IS NOT <u>RUDE</u> – The word means to disrespect someone. And you know rudeness is a basic act of disrespect. We aren't rude to people we respect. I mean, if we really respected someone, we wouldn't dare be rude to them.

Rudeness is a crude insensitivity to the feelings of others.

> **ILLUSTRATION –** Through the years I've heard some of the teenagers in our church who work in restaurants tell me that Sunday is the day they dread working … that church people are the rudest customers they have all week.

LOVE IS NOT <u>SELF-SEEKING</u> – What does that mean? It means that I don't always have to have my way or my rights. It means going after something with a passion and with zeal … and in this case, it's my own agenda that I'm going after.

> Paul has already chastised the Corinthians for this. The wealthy were despising the poor, but insisting that they had the right to start eating at the fellowship meal before the less-advantaged got to the meal.

To be self-seeking means I put my agenda, my needs first.

ILLUSTRATION – I recently read an article written by Dave Goetz entitled "Marital Drift." In it he told of this incident that happened in his marriage: "Recently, Jana and I weathered one of the most stressful weeks in our marriage. I'd spent the previous two weeks traveling for business, and that week I had some presentations to make to clients. It was also the week that Jana moved her mother into a retirement community. I couldn't help with the move because of my work commitments, plus I had to spend time watching the kids while she got her mom settled. By the end of that week, we were exhausted.

"On Sunday evening, I decided to run to my office (which is ten minutes away) to pick up some work. I left without telling Jana. She was busy checking her e-mail, so I thought, I'll just step out, go to the office, and come back; I won't be missed. But I know Jana doesn't like that. She wants a connection before I go anywhere, even to bed.

"When I came home, Jana said: "Dave, you were gone for 30 minutes. You know I hate when you don't tell me you're leaving. Are you mad at me?" And I thought, Am I? I knew I wasn't. But by leaving without doing something I know she likes, I was being passive-aggressive. I had a couple of weeks where I wasn't getting any attention, and I responded by becoming passive. I'll just leave and see if she misses me.

"We think it's no big deal, but it is. It's a spiritual issue. Passivity, or not taking initiative in your marriage, is a spiritual issue because underneath is a deep current that says, My needs aren't getting met, so I'm not going to meet your needs. That's a spiritually dangerous and crippling place to be."

LOVE IS NOT EASILY <u>ANGERED</u> – Now this is very close to the word for "patience." It means to be easily provoked to the point where we want to get even or to hurt someone in return.

Again, just think of the love of the Lord. How often have we provoked the Lord by our disobedience? But God has suffered long with us. He is a righteous Judge. He has the right to condemn us, even for a single sin. But God has been slow to wrath.

James 1:19 (NIV) - Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and <u>slow to become angry</u>…

LOVE KEEPS NO <u>RECORD</u> OF WRONGS – This is a very colorful word that comes from the world of accounting. It described a merchant entering something into a ledger so it would not be forgotten.

ILLUSTRATION – Your checkbook is a ledger. And when you enter something in there … a debit, or a check you wrote, or a deposit you made … you do it so that you won't forget.

And that's good for personal finances, but it is dangerous for personal relationships.

It's so easy for us, when we have been wronged or hurt by someone, to enter that into the ledger so we can hold it against them. We want them to forever be in our debt … to owe us.

It's actually one way that we can minimize our own guilt … by the constant reminder that someone else has sinned against us.

Once again, this ability to forgive is a quality exhibited by our Lord.

Psalm 130:3-4 (NIV) – If you, O LORD, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? [4] But with you there is forgiveness; therefore you are feared.

Now when we sin against God, God doesn't just wink at it and ignore it. God is a holy and a just God. What happens is that when we respond by faith to God's offer of forgiveness through Jesus Christ, when we sin, God takes that sin and puts it under the column of Jesus Christ. And when Jesus died on the cross, He erased the debt we owed God for our sin. And the blood of Jesus continues to cleanse us from all sin. And having experienced that forgiveness, we are obligated to express that forgiveness to others.

1 Corinthians 13:6 (NIV) - Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

LOVE DOES NOT <u>DELIGHT</u> IN EVIL – When you really love someone, you cannot take delight in any evil that befalls them. But O how tempting it is to gloat when someone who has hurt or offended us has something bad happen to them. That is one of the most subtle sins that can creep into our lives.

Instead…

LOVE <u>REJOICES</u> WITH THE TRUTH – This is the opposite of delighting in evil.

1 Corinthians 13:7 (NIV) - It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

LOVE ALWAYS <u>PROTECTS</u> – The word literally means to "put up with something," or "to cover over something, so as to keep the water out."

LOVE ALWAYS <u>TRUSTS</u> – Now love isn't gullible, but rather it is discerning and intelligent. This means is to believe the best about someone else. Love's first instinct is to trust someone. The Bible says that perfect love casts our fear.

Certainly, love will be betrayed some time or the other. People we love and trust will let us down. But it is still better to go through life believing in others and sometimes being deceived, than to go through life, never loving someone enough to really trust them.

LOVE ALWAYS <u>HOPES</u> – Love refuses to finally and ultimately condemn someone or to quit on them or to believe that they could never change.

LOVE ALWAYS <u>PERSEVERES</u> – Love just keeps on loving, even when others fail.

The word "perseveres" is a combination of two words that mean "to abide under."

One commentator has summarized v.7 in this way: "When Love has no evidence, it believes the best. When the evidence is adverse, it hopes for the best. And when hopes are repeated disappointed, it still courageously perseveres."

1 Corinthians 13:8a (NIV) - Love never fails.

LOVE NEVER <u>FAILS</u> – Now there are times when it appears that love fails.

> **ILLUSTRATION** – Several years ago there was a man in our church who got into some terrible legal and moral problems. His wife tried to love him through these problems. I met with him many times to try to get him to come to acknowledge his sin and repent, but he never would. This went on for month after month. Finally, the man left his family, wouldn't return my calls, and today he's in a lot of trouble. Now it may appear that love failed there, in that it didn't bring about the desired result.
>
> When it says, "Love never fails," it doesn't mean that love always *succeeds*; it means that love never *recedes*.

CONCLUSION

I asked you at the beginning to think of these verses as a portrait of love, painted by the Holy Spirit. And with each stroke of the brush the picture has become more complete and more beautiful … and amazingly with the portrait finished … it looks like Jesus. In fact it *is* Jesus.

In my own strength, I can't love. My human love fails. But God's love living in me will never fail. It will always keeps going.

CONCLUSION

1 John 4:7 (NIV) - Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

- This is a test – Maybe you're thinking, "I don't love like that, but I should."

- This is an invitation – Maybe you're thinking, "I can't love like that. I need Christ."