

12 Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. **13** Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord^[a] has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. **14** Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. **15** And let the peace of Christ^[b] rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. **16** Let the word of Christ^[c] dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.^[d] **17** And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Well. Here you are, Brooke and Ben, all dressed in your wedding finery. You are a very attractive couple on this most significant day of your lives, a couple I like very much -- each of you separately, and as a couple. Behind my affection for you is my respect: you each have deep spiritual convictions which have shaped your character as Christian adults. You've done a lot of work to prepare yourselves spiritually and emotionally for being married. I believe you're more than ready to joyfully undertake the challenges of marriage.

When you take off your wedding clothes, what are you going to put on? How does one dress for success in a marriage? What are you going to wear to ensure that yours will be enduring and satisfying?

Paul, in **Colossians 3:12-17**, has some suggestions for a marriage wardrobe. First, put on compassion. Literally, compassion means "a heart of pity." Compassion is an inner attitude you

each have toward the other — a fullness of tender caring for and about the other's vulnerability and strengths which will overflow into how you treat each other privately and in public.

On top of compassion, put on kindness. Now there's an article of clothing that gets to be in short supply in a marriage sometimes! When you are clothed with kindness you will be seeking the other's good as you deal with each others' weaknesses and sore spots. Kindness is a garment with healing in its wings.

Then there's another item of clothing that does a marriage good: humility. If ever there is an arena where pride and the need to be right and the struggle for power occur, it's in a marriage. Lack of humility leads to every kind of struggle. Humility recognizes the other's equal status, recognizes that each has needs and plans which are equally valid.

Gentleness is another worthy garment for a marriage. Gentleness is the garment of the God-controlled person. When you put on gentleness, the other can take off self-defensive armor, wariness, fearfulness, and can put on trust. Every marriage could use several garments of gentleness.

Now, here's an absolutely necessary article of clothing for a marriage: patience. Each of you will discover, if you haven't already, that the other has the capacity to drive you crazy! It doesn't matter what the issue is: marriage takes patience. And these are just the surface things. Patience requires humor, a spirit of live and let live. But mostly patience takes love.

Another essential garment for a marriage is a spirit of forbearance and forgiveness. There's a lot that needs to be endured in a marriage, a lot that requires forbearance. It is a spirit of forgiveness that makes difficult things endurable, maybe even erases them. Nowhere more than in marriage,

love is repeatedly having to say "I'm sorry." Don't say it to get out of a tight spot. Say it because you know that in no other relationship is the other so vulnerable, so easily hurt. And when the other has asked forgiveness, grant it. Speak not only your pain, but speak the word of peace as well.

If compassion is marriage's inner garment, and if kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance and forgiveness are its active-wear shirts and pants and skirts and socks, then love is the overcoat. "On top of all these things," Paul says, "put on love." Love keeps a marriage warm.

Love is not merely an emotion. Love as an emotion can wear thin and threadbare when feelings ebb. Love, as the overcoat that keeps a marriage warm, is made up of two things, both of which must be there for marriage to endure: commitment and caring. It's the solid ground on which your marriage rests. "I will be there for you." That's the commitment you make with your vows. But what good is commitment without caring? Caring says, "I commit myself to you. I will be there for you."

When you marry, you signal, in a real way, the end to your life as you knew it. Now marriage does not mean that you lose your individualism or your freedom or your responsibility to control your life. The other will now always be a factor that conditions your decision making. When you marry, you commit yourself to the other, you promise to caringly bring your whole self to your relationship.

These clothes Paul invites us to put on are not made of natural fibers. They are woven of spiritual stuff. Try as you might in your own power to create them, you need God to create them. For instance, human nature says, "I'll do my fair share but no more." Or, "She deserved it." Or "It's

his turn to give in." Compassion, humility, kindness, gentleness, forgiveness, love -- these don't come naturally. They are gifts God gives us when we pray for them.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, and patience, forbearing one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive. And above all these things, put on love, which binds everything in perfect harmony. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts.