

# Marriage at the Foot of the Cross

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Dr. John Gottman is a renowned clinical psychologist and researcher. For over 35 years, he has been studying married couples, to learn the answer to two questions:

1. What makes for a satisfying marriage?
2. What are the predictors of divorce?

Through his research, Dr. Gottman discovered there are four behaviors that can signify doom for a marital relationship when these behaviors are the predominant way couples interact with one another. He termed these behaviors, "The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" – which are criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

**Criticism** attacks the character or personality of the person. It usually comes with the attitude of "I am right, you are wrong." This is different than a complaint which focuses on a specific behavior. If used, criticism often leads to contempt.

**Contempt** is attacking a person's sense of self, implying that there is something globally wrong with them. There is an attitude of superiority and a stance of "I am better than you; you are not as good as I am." It communicates disgust with the person. When one partner uses contempt, the other frequently responds with defensiveness.

**Defensiveness** is seeing yourself as a victim and attacking back. It is responding to a criticism with "It is not my fault, so it must be your fault." This behavior does not solve the problem but rather increases the conflict. Defensiveness can lead to stonewalling.

**Stonewalling** can happen when a partner feels overwhelmed with the conflict and so they withdraw from the conversation or physically separate themselves.

Out of the four horsemen, contempt is the most damaging to the relationship. This behavior and attitude is in direct contrast to our relationship with God. In our relationship with God, we are all seen as equal.

We were all made in God's image and his workmanship is evident in all of us. In Genesis 1:27 ESV the Bible says, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them." Although it is hard for us to comprehend, we are all God's favorite and the apple of His eye. The ground is level at the foot of the cross; none of us are better or worse than one another. With the help of the Lord, we can see ourselves and our loved ones as the Lord does: completely loved, completely accepted, and completely forgiven.

"Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins," as is written in 1 Peter 4:8 ESV. We are all sinners. We all make mistakes. We all need grace.

And we all do things that we come to regret. If we can look at ourselves and our loved ones with compassion and forgiveness, change is possible. Compassion and forgiveness bring about a far better change than criticism, contempt, defensiveness and stonewalling.

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