

In the early second century, about AD 111, Pliny the Governor of Pontus wrote emperor Trajan in Rome to ask him how he should proceed in trying Christians for their belief in Christ.

- **The Legal Problem:** Believing in a crucified leader was **sedition to the state**. Because they prized law and order, following a **crucified Jew meant to follow someone in rebellion to the public order of Rome**. Strike one.
- **The Religious Problem:** Exclusive **devotion to Christ was enmity with the state** religion of Emperor Worship and the Lawful Worship of the Roman Pantheon of gods.
- **The Political Problem:** Worshiping Jesus, a dead and risen Palestinian Jew, was **treason to the state**. Paul was careful to *always identify* Jesus as “the Christ.” This title was problematic because it was a Jewish title of the Messiah—the King who was expected to subdue and subjugate the nations of the world (including Rome). **To refer to Jesus as “Christ” or “king” or “Lord” was subversion to Caesar’s rule**.
Illus. **In fact, Church Father and Pastor Polycarp was executed for this very reason.** Officials pleaded with Polycarp to renounce Jesus by saying, “Caesar is Lord.” In response, he said loudly “Jesus Christ is Lord.”
- **The Social Problem:** The pressure on neighborhoods to give up the names of Christians was intense.

Here’s an excerpt from Pliny the Governor’s letter to Trajan (AD 111)

Because Christianity was emptying out their temples, former pagans leaving their idolatrous trades—Pliny asks for advice:

Soon accusations spread, as usually happens, because of the proceedings going on, and several incidents occurred. An anonymous document was published containing the names of many persons. Those who denied that they were or had been Christians, when they invoked the gods in words dictated by me, offered prayer with incense and wine to your image, which I had ordered to be brought for this purpose together with statues of the gods, and moreover cursed Christ—**none of which those who are really Christians, it is said, can be forced to do...** They asserted, however, that the sum and substance of their fault or error had been that they were accustomed to meet on a fixed day before dawn and sing responsively a hymn to Christ as to a god, and to bind themselves by oath, **not to some crime, but not to commit fraud, theft, or adultery, not falsify their trust, nor to refuse to return a trust when called upon to do so...** Accordingly, I judged it all the more necessary to find out what the truth was by torturing two female slaves who were called deaconesses. But I discovered nothing else but **depraved and excessive delusional beliefs**.

Similarly Greek Philosophers accused Christians of cannibalism, child abuse, wild sexual immorality, poverty and low social standing, and atheism (because of their rejection of the gods).

The values of the Christian faith were certainly not in line with ancient Rome: Their Contempt for the Christian values of humility, mercy, forgiveness, patient endurance in suffering—all values that Rome believed were weak.

At the same time, Rome was experiencing the tensions of constant wars and the retaking of conquered territories

- Political **corruption** was rampant
- Political **partisanship** caused deep divisions among the upper classes
- The simmering frustrations of **the inability to vote** for Representatives
- **Slaves were being manumitted** at an astonishing rate due to lack of funds resulting in mass starvation and homelessness in many cities.
- Internal **revolutions** were a drain on society, the military, and resources
- **Disease was widespread**; plagues and pandemics that had lasted decades had sufficiently weakened the country. One of their plagues lasted 20 years: as contagious as Covid and deadly as Ebola.

And when you live in a superstitious world like this—you wonder why the gods are not favoring you? The god of fortune isn't smiling on you? And you look for something, someone to blame. And Rome, at times, scapegoated the new, fledgling and flourishing religion called the Christian Faith.

Christians who worshiped Jesus were on thin ice to begin with—in a culture ravaged politically, economically, morally, socially and physically—and what pastoral instruction do you give Christians living in an increasingly hostile world?

1 Peter 2:12-17

¹² Live honorably among the ethnic nations, so that when they defame you as villains, they will observe your good works and so glorify God on the Day he visits.

¹³ Submit to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the highest authority ¹⁴ or to local governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do what is good. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that you silence witless foolishness by doing good. ¹⁶ Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a disguise for evil behavior, but as God's servants. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Show deference to the emperor.

Peter's pastoral instructions to them and to us are:

Live honorably among the nations. Conduct yourselves with honor rather than the shameful lusts that wage war against your souls.

The word *honorable* is *kalos* meaning “beautiful, honorable, noble, distinguished by the good.”

We are charged with living according to the value system of heaven. This value system is at times counter-cultural as it produces the kinds of virtues in the Christian that are not values much nor reflected much in the world's system.

Christian virtues:

- **Passionate love for God.** We've never lived in a time when people had it so good they didn't have to think about heaven every waking hour of their miserable and difficult lives. For the first time in human history we have the luxury of pursuing life, liberty, happiness. What other culture in the history of the world cared about that. They were too busy surviving, eeking out an existence, pandemic dodging. But of all the things in our world to capture our attention—we are called to a singular worship and devotion to our God. To become passionate worshipers of God. That is our highest virtue.
- **Compassion for the grieving.** Every person Jesus ever touched or ever healed; every miracle Jesus ever did—God could have done it from heaven without sending Jesus. But it something about the embodied compassion of Christ for the suffering, for the grief-stricken, there's something about it that just has a powerful impact on your heart. Isa. 51:19 “These two things have happened to you: devastation and destruction, famine and sword. Who will grieve for you? How can I comfort you?” **As the Church of Jesus, the Messiah we are called to lead. We tell people the truth about where they are: you are here in the middle of calamity, in the middle of this horror**—this is what has happened and it's poor leadership to pretend it hasn't or that it's not a thing. And immediately the response God has for that fact, for that truth is “How can I lock arms with you in your grief? You tell me—how may I comfort you in your mourning?” And then God says, “I'll be there for you, with you, to lead you.” This is a **candid-compassion** that doesn't flinch at recognizing the causes of how we got here. But we mourn with those who mourn and grieve with those who grieve.

- **Law abiding citizens.** ¹³ Yield to every human authority because of the Lord, whether to the emperor as the highest authority ¹⁴ or to local governors as those sent out by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do what is good. ¹⁵ For it is God's will that you silence the witless fools by doing good.

We are to submit to the governing authority figures. Now, the word for governing authorities is anthropinos the root of which we get the word for anthropology—which is the study of human cultures. So, Peter is not talking here about obedience or submission to an office, or a generalization to the governing treaty or constitution. He could have said, “Submit to the governing document of the Pax Romana” or “Submit to the laws governing society” but he does not word it that way. He uses a word that can only mean “the authority of a human being.” That is, a person whom God has allowed to ascend to the halls of power. **We obey the law so long as those arbiters of the law do not forbid what God commands, nor command what God forbids.**

- **Evidence that the Gospel has transformed us.** ¹⁵ For it is God's will that you silence the witlessness of foolish people by doing good. What is the best argument and evidence for God?

How do we silence the false accusations of a hostile world, ignorant of God's truth?

Best Arguments and Evidence for the Gospel:

1. **God's person.** There is no better evidence for God than God's revealed presence to **convict and convince** the unbeliever of the truth. Now, God has chosen to mediate his presence through means. What are the means of his convicting and convincing the unbeliever of truth.
2. **God's proclaimed Gospel.** There is a quiet strength in the unsophisticated, unadorned simple presentation of the Gospel message: The **royal** announcement **(Isa. 1)** that the world's rightful **king** has come to **save** us from our **sin**; That King led a sinless-Torah faithful life; died in crucifixion to atone for sin **(elimination/expiation; appeasement/propitiation)** conquered sin and death in his bodily resurrection; ascending to the right hand of God; And this royal proclamation to the world is the power of God unto salvation for the forgiveness of sins.

For in this way, entry into the eternal **kingdom** of our Lord and **Savior** Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you (2 Pet. 1:11)

3. **God's people suffering in the name of Christ.** The cruciform life of suffering the same persecution, defamation, and rejection that Jesus suffered. Cruciform apologetics. When you and I live through the same things that those in the world live through—yet we come through with a strengthened faith, a burnished character, an unshakeable hope and resilience in the Gospel—that is the best evidence that the Christian Gospel is powerful and effective.
 4. **God's propositional truth—the evidence and arguments for the faith.** In the next chapter Peter will challenge us to respond to the unbeliever with gentleness and respect, always being prepared to give an answer for the hope within. There is most definitely a place for being prepared to address the intellectual challenges to the Christian faith. But I put this as number four because it is not our first priority. Our first priority is the simple, proclaimed Gospel of Jesus that meets a person at the point of their most desperate need. And then to live in the hope and strength of that Gospel as the rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous. When our neighbors know that we are real, then they will know that our Gospel and the God of the Gospel is for real. And preparing to answer objections to the faith is important, it's necessary, and its beneficial but not nearly as effective as the first three.
- **Cruciform service to our neighbors.** ¹⁶ Submit as free people, not using your freedom as a disguise for evil behavior, but as God's servants. ¹⁷ Honor everyone. Love the brothers and sisters. Fear God. Show deference to the emperor. Pat mentioned it last week. Let's take a second to define what we mean by a Cruciformity. Paul told the **Corinthians** in 2:2 **"I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified."** Now, if that's all Paul taught them then how do they know anything about spiritual gifts, church polity, the Lord's supper, meat sacrificed to idols and all the **Pauline traditions he says he gave them in 11:2?** It's because **when Paul writes of "Christ crucified" he is not just talking about the cross that saves you but the cross that shapes you. The message of Christ's cross and resurrection is the power of God for salvation, but it is also *the pattern of God for spiritual formation.* And the Corinthians have not misunderstood the message of the cross *for salvation*, otherwise Paul would have to re-evangelize them. No. They have misunderstood the message of the cross for *sanctification*—you and I are supposed to be formed after the pattern of Christ's sacrificial service to humanity. Living in ways that serve others sacrificially. **Cruciformity also takes the shape of suffering** in the name of Christ. When we are slandered and maligned and accused falsely, when we are persecuted and ridiculed for the faith—we are to be lambs in wrathful world. Shrewd and gentle. Astute**

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yet tender in how we handle people. Let the love you have for God spill over into the lives of those who are made in his image *regardless of whether you think they deserve it.*

This is how we honor everyone, even the people we disagree with. This is how we love the brotherhood, even the parts of the body of Christ we don't agree with on all matters. This is how we live in fear of God and honor of the ruling authorities.

Passionate love for God

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Cruciform service to our neighbors