

The following is a sample of the false accusations brought against Christians in the Roman Empire:

- Christians were accused of *propagating anti-government rhetoric* because they spoke of another king and kingdom.²⁹ Of course, we understand that they were speaking of Christ and the Kingdom of God. But according to the Roman mindset, a reference to another king and kingdom was considered both dangerous and subversive. Consequently, rumors abounded that Christians were subverters of the Roman government.
- Christians were accused of *being rebellious to authority* because they refused to bow to idols of the Emperor Domitian.³⁰ Believers also refused to call Domitian “lord” as was demanded of people throughout the entire Roman Empire, including Roman senators and nobility. Few people had the courage to disobey this imperial order to worship the emperor; thus, the Christians’ refusal to bow to pressure caused a pagan world to view them as rebels in Roman society.
- Christians were accused of *being law-breakers* because they gathered together in meetings, even though they didn’t have permission to do so.³¹ It was illegal to congregate without the approval of the Roman government; therefore, every time Christians met to pray or worship, it was a violation of Roman law. Christians were already held in suspicion because they spoke of another king and kingdom. Add to this the fact that Christians violated pagan law in order to merely congregate, and it gave the pagan world the impression that Christians were meeting in illegal, underground meetings to discuss subversive plans against the government.
- Christians were accused of *being anti-societal* because they wouldn’t attend the public games where human beings were slaughtered, nor would they frequent the theater, where godlessness was paraded on the public stage.³² To a pagan world, it seemed that Christians had withdrawn into a suspicious subculture in which they refused to participate in the normal affairs of life. This commitment on the part of believers to live holy and separate lives from the godless world around them produced great misunderstanding and resulted in many rumors that they were an anti-societal group.
- Christians were accused of *being atheists* because they had no idols in their homes and didn’t attend pagan temples for worship.³³ The homes and businesses of pagans were adorned with many idols. Furthermore, it was a common practice for people to go to their pagan temples to worship and make sacrifices. Therefore, in a society filled with idolatry, the Christians’ lack of any idols and their refusal to go to pagan temples meant they were without “gods” and were therefore atheists.
- Christians were accused of *being sexually loose* because they celebrated an event called a “love feast” in their illegal meetings.³⁴ This referred to a time of fellowship between the saints that included the celebration of Communion and a communal meal. But in a pagan world where perversion was commonplace, this Christian event was misconstrued to be a feast where participants indulged in sex of every kind. One can only imagine how horrible the rumors must have been, considering they were created by morally loose pagans who possessed very few taboos.
- Christians were accused of *practicing cannibalism* because they celebrated Communion, which, of course, is a celebration of the shed blood and broken body of Jesus.³⁵ It was rumored that Christians were eating flesh and drinking blood in their illegal underground meetings. Although it seems almost unbelievable that such a charge could be considered serious, this speculation about Christians practicing cannibalism continued for several centuries.³⁶
- Christians were accused of *being arsonists* after the great fire of Rome in 67 AD. The Emperor Nero was responsible for the blaze that destroyed much of Rome and caused great loss of life. But when he saw that he was going to be blamed for this devastating fire, Nero searched for a scapegoat. He found that Christians were a convenient choice because they publicly preached that judgment and eternal fire awaited the unrighteous.³⁷ This Christian message was very unpopular with the pagan Roman population, so it was easy for Nero to blame the inferno on those who preached about the fires of hell. It was this very charge that initiated the first brutal, large-scale wave of persecution against believers in Jesus Christ.