[We ask again], why was the Christian community something that people wanted to join? … Rome is a very strict hierarchical system, in which the emperor is at the pinnacle, all the way up and then all the blessings in the world that come to people come down from above. The emperor is the conduit [connecting path] to the divine world. And if you’re at the bottom of that social pyramid, not a whole lot of things are coming down to you anymore…. 

Now the Christian community, as we have it particularly in the letters of Paul, … says in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free…. Here is a community that invites you, which makes you an equal with all other members of that community. Which does not give you any disadvantages. On the contrary, it gives even the lowliest slave personal dignity and status. Moreover … the care for each other becomes very important…. If they are hungry, they know where to go. If they are sick, there is an elder who will lay on hands to them to heal them.

Source: Helmut Koester, as quoted in *From Jesus to Christ*, 2009.

1. Helmut Koester refers to ancient Rome as “a very strict hierarchical system.” what do you think that means?

2. What does Koester men when he says, “in Christ there is neither Jew or Greek, neither male nor female, neither slave nor free”?

3. How can you use this document to explain why people would have joined an early Christian community?
Roman Ideology and Christianity, Compared

A crucial difference between the program of Caesar and the program of Christ is between peace through violent victory and peace through nonviolent justice. Here, in comparison and contrast . . . are those two visions:

Roman Ideology → Violence → Victory → Peace

Versus

Christianity → Nonviolence → Justice → Peace

There will be peace on earth, said Roman ideology, when all is quiet and orderly. There will be peace on earth, said Christianity, when all is fair and just.


1. According to the chart, how did Roman leader expect to achieve peace in the world?

2. According to the chart, how did Christianity expect to achieve peace in the world?

3. How might one use this document to explain why Christianity took hold in the ancient world?