

I have now completed my posts on the debate I had with myself in front of my New Testament class on the question of whether the New Testament book of Acts is historically reliable. If you want to see the whole debate, just read the posts in sequence: the affirmative speech arguing Acts is indeed reliable; the negative speech arguing that it is not; the negative rebuttal of what the affirmative side said; and finally the affirmative rebuttal of what the negative side said. In class I delivered the speeches one after the other. When “affirmative” I was wearing a sport coat, but no cap; when “negative” I was wearing a baseball cap but no sport coat – just so students would realize that it was a “different” speaker speaking.

I have pointed out on the blog before that even though I do a lot of public debates, I often find them more than a little frustrating and frequently (in fact, almost always) ask myself, in the course of the debate, why I’m doing this to myself. People basically hear what they want to hear, and most of the time people simply want to hear someone arguing for the position that they already hold in order to confirm to themselves that they are right. Nearly everyone does this. So what’s the point? People come in, almost always, either agreeing or disagreeing with me, and almost nothing I say (or my opponent says) will change their mind. They will simply feel confirmed by the side they already agree with.

I feel that frustration even in this debate that I have with myself. When I finished the debate (this was a couple of weeks ago), I asked my class of 140 students which side they thought won the debate. And about two-thirds of the class thought ...

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