In my post yesterday I discussed the first debate topic assigned to my undergraduate class on the New Testament, on the relationship of Paul and Jesus, and the question of whether they represented fundamentally the same religion or not. Of all the debate topics that I assign, I think that one is the most central to the understanding of the New Testament and the history of Christianity, as it deals with the root of the very problem of Christianity itself as it developed into a new religion, separate from Judaism.

But the other debate topics are really important too – extremely important – and a bit more, well, controversial. The students enjoy that first one well enough – but not perhaps as much as they could, since they don’t really yet see what an enormous issue it is. (And because since it is the first debate, students tend not to prepare for it as much; once the rest of the class sees what a big deal these debates are, they tend to prepare a lot more for them). But they understand the importance of the other two. Here is the second one:

RESOLVED: Paul’s Views of Women Were Oppressive.

Give our contemporary world and the atmosphere in which students have grown up, they have a good sense of why this one really matters. I don’t need to tell most members of the blog about the sexism that still goes on in our world today. Do I need to mention the current political climate and the implicit and at times, quite remarkably, highly explicit gender biases at play in it? Or the broader political and cultural issues involved with equality? Or, even more striking, in many religious circles of our immediate world, the role the Bible plays in the discourse? Students don’t always have a sophisticated understanding of the history, or even the current situation, of both explicit and implicit sexism. But they do, as a whole understand that it is and has been a big issue.

Again this debate resolution is intentionally constructed in such a way that ...

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