CHAPTER 6

The Shepherd and the Witness: Jesus with Peter and the Beloved Disciple

Teachers will differ for each student, one much, one little, just as a young man differs from a woman and old men will differ from women and youngsters alike. . . . To any who display errors, he will speak with frankness, while to some he will speak on an individual basis by way of jest, though the actions in need of correction are the same.

PHILODEMUS, On Frank Criticism, Col. vi ab

The examples of Jesus’ interactions with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the sisters of Bethany, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas all reveal that Jesus does adapt to different people differently to bring each to a single goal of understanding and faith, which brings about eternal life. In this chapter, the focus will fall primarily upon the ways in which Jesus brings about changes among two of his disciples, Simon Peter and the Beloved Disciple, who very frequently appear alongside one another. This is to be seen as an expansion of Jesus’ efforts to bring people to understanding and faith, as his instruction of these two disciples will result in the ongoing pedagogy of Jesus’ followers after his departure. That is, the Johannine Jesus adapts to both disciples to equip them for different, though essential roles, one as shepherd, the other as witness.

The roles for these two disciples correspond to each man’s particular strengths: Peter, who emerges early on as a leader among Jesus’ followers, will also serve as a leader in Jesus’ stead; the Beloved Disciple, who is both close to Jesus and observant, will provide insightful witness to others about Jesus’ life and significance. Yet each disciple must undergo a transformation of sorts in order to fulfill the role Jesus sets out for him. Peter, a man of self-determination, will transform into a man of submission to God’s will, while the Beloved disciple will move from passive observation to active testimony. Jesus will moreover provide the fundamental force that enables such alterations in both men. In so doing, the Johannine Jesus will utilize different methods, as his guidance of

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1 Modified translation from Philodemus, On Frank Criticism (trans. by David Konstan et al.; SBLTT 43; Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1998), 100–101.

2 See Hartwig Thyen, Das Johannesevangelium (HNT 6; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 598–600.
Peter is with a heavy hand, while his formation of the Beloved Disciple works much more subtly. Furthermore, Jesus makes use of man of the same methods that characterized the adaptable guide in Chapter 1, such as variation, repetition, harsh/gentle speech, examples, and providing opportunities for both failure and success. That is, Jesus’ pedagogy employs an adaptable disposition, and in so doing provides for the future needs of his followers for their ongoing life and faith. In what follows, I will analyze the ways in which Jesus does just that by exploring the interactions, both overt and implied, between Jesus and these two disciples in the Gospel narrative.

Peter and the Beloved Disciple: Competing or Complementary?

Before exploring Jesus’ guidance of these two characters, one must first deal with the question of their juxtaposition in the Gospel. Are these two men depicted in such a way that one of them is to be seen as possessing a better form of discipleship or a fuller understanding of Jesus? Or should readers understand them as distinct but nevertheless appropriate ways of responding to Jesus? The question has exercised Johannine scholarship for some time, with many claiming that the Beloved Disciple ought to be regarded as superior to Peter, and that his discipleship is the paradigm for all other disciples. More recently, however, a growing concert of voices has argued the opposite,

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3 A recent study has offered a different counterpart for the Beloved Disciple, John the Baptist; Dorothy A. Lee, “Witness in the Fourth Gospel: John the Baptist and the Beloved Disciple as Counterparts,” ABR 61 (2013): 1–17. The pairing of these two, as Lee presents it, is not within the narrative world, however, but in the framing of the Gospel, creating a “literary inclusio” (1–2), and contributing to the Gospel’s legal and forensic elements.