Two issues of Johannine scholarship, one a longstanding issue and the other a more recent one, may both be advanced by dealing with them together. The longstanding issue concerns the disciple whom Jesus loved, introduced at 13:23 and often called the Beloved Disciple. Since this disciple remains unnamed even in subsequent appearances, scholars have sought to identify him but none of the numerous proposals has proved persuasive. Of more recent concern is the theme of friendship in the Gospel. Scholars have naturally focused on Jesus and have regarded him as the exemplary friend, especially through his laying down his life for his friends (15:13), a commonplace sentiment of ancient friendship discussions. But this concern rarely goes beyond a christological use of friendship discussions.

The purpose of this essay is to argue that discussions of this unnamed, if important, disciple in the Gospel would be more fruitful if we were to move beyond the question of identity—that is, who is this disciple?—a question that seems to defy being answered, to another question, the question of function—that is, what role does this disciple play in the narrative? The answer to this question of function emerges more clearly if we look for it in terms of the second issue, the theme of friendship, but apply the friendship conventions not only to Jesus but also to the Beloved Disciple. Specifically, I propose that the Beloved Disciple’s behavior would have been regarded by readers of John’s Gospel as those of a friend to Jesus. Indeed, as Jesus’ friend the two of them become a pair of friends—indeed, a pair of Christian

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friends—much like the various pairs of friends that were so common a feature of Greco-Roman discussions of friendship, namely, the convention of visualizing ideal friendships in terms of pairs.

2. THE BELOVED DISCIPLE AND FRIENDSHIP: TWO SEPARATE ISSUES IN JOHANNINE STUDIES

Our first task, however, will be to situate this proposal more fully in the discussions of these two issues before relating them to one another. The anonymous disciple “whom Jesus loved” appears only in the Gospel of John. Anonymous characters appear regularly in this Gospel, even rather prominent ones, such as the Samaritan woman in chapter 4 and the man born blind in chapter 9, not to mention Jesus’ mother (2:1–12; 19:25–27).¹ There are even other unnamed disciples (1:35, 40; perhaps 18:15), but what makes the Beloved Disciple so intriguing is that he has a role in a number of key events in the Gospel, especially in the passion narrative. This disciple appears for the first time in the midst of the last supper, introduced initially as “one of the disciples” (εἷς ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν) and then further specified as the disciple “whom Jesus loved” (ὁ ἤγάπασα ὁ Ἰησοῦς) (13:23). He is probably the “other disciple” (Ἄλλος μαθητής) who went with Jesus into the palace of the high priest where Jesus was to be questioned (18:15–16).² He is definitely present at the cross in an exchange with Jesus and his mother (19:25–27) and

