

**E: Buddy or Boyfriend (Theological) – minus 4 points**Buddy Jesus

Jesus is my lord, my big brother, and the biggest singer in my family (Heb.2:12), but he's no friend of mine. Shock horror to some, yet commonplace to others. Let's define some ideas. In ultimate eternity, even as girl/guy love will be as redundant chaff, so, I suspect, will mere friendship. In the here and now, these are both wonderful expressions of love, yet when the perfect comes, the imperfect is retired. Aionologically, this is the problem I have with reunions "on the other side", a mere continuance of human loves. We should not squeeze our definitions into the Bible. What are its meanings of friendship? First, what do you make of Lincoln Brewster's *What A Friend I've Found* (2002)?<sup>1</sup> It is attractive. Those bereaved from, or who have never known, the richness of either a mother's love, a friendship love, or a spouse's love, can warm to the idea that deity can role model, surrogate, these human loves. I'd love to be ardently committed to the idea of Jesus as my best friend. Does this make him so? What of folk passionate to the idea that the Blessed Virgin is their mother, or that Jesus' body was broken? Does their passion make these so? We should never believe simply to fulfil our wishes and the theologies built around them.

In my books, if Jesus is our buddy, as I used to believe, then I believe it can only be known by extrabiblical revelation, for I believe it isn't biblical revelation. And I'm a little reluctant to ground my doctrine outside of Scripture, especially if in line with my wishes. What I've come to see is that the definition of friendship<sup>2</sup> in John 15, is about promotion from servants to confidants, allies, *if* they maintained their obedience. A "come with me through the cross, then I'll show you my plans", so to speak. Jesus would talk new covenant to those who would walk humbly in mission with him. Possibly this friendship meant simply that his inner group would soon enter the Christian plan for life (Jhn.17:3), which they would open up to the world and put into written form, the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> Possibly it applies directly to each sibling who submits to his lordship, the path of discipleship we may all travel. But if you really insist on citing Jhn.15 for calling Jesus *friend*, do you equally insist on having promoted *him* from your slave to someone you share *your* plans with—so long as he obeys *you*? Because that's how it pans out *if* you're talking as *he* talked about his disciples. He talked of unilateral, not bilateral, alliance, not about us being buddies, something asymmetrical. Scripture likewise says that Abraham was a friend of God, but it doesn't say that God was a friend of Abraham. The loud silence speaks volumes. A unilateral, one way thing, a privilege granted by the higher, not by the lower. The OT lacked a buddy theology. Nor is Pr.18:24 an exception, since it does not imply Yahweh. In the NT, *Friend of Sinners* (Mt.11:19/Lk.7:34) means one who helped them, not their best buddy at the boozier. Joseph Scriven's (1855) *What A Friend We Have In Jesus*, has *friend* as *benevolent rescuer*, a friendly ally. Scriven understood the point about friendly help (*all our sins and*

<sup>1</sup> What a friend I've found / Closer than a brother / I have felt your touch / More intimate than lovers / Jesus, friend forever / What a hope I've found / More faithful than a mother / It would break my heart / To ever lose each other. It has fairly good rhyme, although lovers (perhaps "a lover") doesn't quite rhyme with brother/forever/mother/other.

<sup>2</sup> Here the term is *philia*, which for convenience but not for biblical reason, we can confine to the idea, *friendship*. By NT times the contrasts of Classical Greek had blurred. *Philia* & *agapē* could be used interchangeably: Jesus three times asked whether Peter loved him (*philia*), yet John's record used *agapē* twice, and *philia* once (Jhn.21:15-7); love (*agapē*) can be against God (Jhn.3:19); and God loves (*philia*) his son (Jhn.5:20).

<sup>3</sup> Yes, there was also Paul. Yet he made sure to check with the first batch of apostles, and had a very special foundational call as an apostle. The basic plan was already given before Pentecost.

*griefs to bear*) for Christians. And the level of friendship perhaps depends on how open to God we are. With deeper discipleship, comes deeper understanding of his nature and his covenant plans. The closeness of the spirit who represents Jesus, is another matter, but isn't buddyism.

*Contra* Buddy Theology, I suggest *The Four Loves* (C S Lewis), and *Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (D A Carson). *Friend* has a range of meaning (for example *Facebook*, buddy, friendly fire, befriend): Scripture should be read contextually and exegetically (perceptively), not eisegetically (*reader response*). Reader response has always been big. In the fifth century, a heresy hunting Eastern archbishop (*aka* patriarch) of Constantinople, born in Kahramanmaraş, Turkey, and educated in Syrian Antioch (*aka* Antakya, Turkey), flagged up his concern that Mary was being worshipped as deity (would Islam not welcome him?), and suggested that church-speak should be more careful.<sup>4</sup> The majority feared that taking his advice would lead to Jesus no longer being worshipped as deity (would Witnessism not welcome him?). The ruckus raised, showed that favoured concepts had their devotees, and the bishop's suggestion that Mary wasn't God's *mother*, simply *Christ's* mother, horrified them. Today that individual, Nestorius, is still cursed in Orthodoxy, though I doubt that he minds. Reading as we wish to respond, tends to misreading. In similar vein, are those who have claimed Jesus (the father, and spirit, are frequently ditched) as *friend/husband/father*, more likely to charge than change? I happily encourage the deep intimacy between God and his children, which his son's death enabled and the spirit's indwelling promotes, but he doesn't wish us to go all mushy on him, nor to overlook his command position.

Can the warm fuzziness of buddyism, devalue divine intimacy? Chris Idle (Reform) noted how so-called *Liberal Christianity* (*aka* quasichristianity) likes to encourage feminine terms such as *mother*, and enjoys the "*delightfully ambiguous 'Partner' and 'Lover.'* Charles Wesley of course wrote *Jesu Lover... but even then brother John was not so keen, omitting it from his 1771 book*" (Reform). The West has a large antimarriage lobby,<sup>5</sup> some of which infects the church, strangling to death terms such as *spouse* and *marriage partner*, with *partner*, and the almighty *Ms* which undermines Mrs/Miss distinctions—distinctions predicated on marriage, so derided by Ms ideologues. How does one socially engineer away the idea that marriage as sacred, alone set up by God for interpersonal sex? Easy, suggest that that's uncaring, unscientific, bigoted, and using various other negative slurs, on the slide leading into the moral void, throw in reams of talk feely talk to promote the idea that IPS is amoral, an as-you-like-it, with-whom-you-like-it, for as-long-as-you-like-it. *You, like, it*, being the operative words. Devaluing this way, western government are, for, now limited principally by the tenuous concept of mutual consent.<sup>6</sup> I

<sup>4</sup> Ordinarily what a mother conceives is fully part of herself. With the incarnation her genes went into only part of the package, the personhood was beyond creation. What was born was the one set aside, the christ, a unique blend of creation and transcreation. She was thus the mother/bearer of Christ, the human anointed child, even though his personhood predated her. Whether his humanity blended in her personality I leave aside. Ordinarily personality comes from both parents, but this conception was not ordinary though of one as fully human as the first sinless Adam. There was a time when Jesus was not; there was never a time when God's son was not.

<sup>5</sup> Marriage has stood a litmus test of relational loyalty, and carries God's voice that unwedded IPS is wrong. Like all of us, those who like unwed IPS, dislike being condemned. Their basic method to justify themselves is, having formed an ideological network, to denounce & degrade the concept, marriage, and the even bigger claim of the divine authority which demands their obedience.

<sup>6</sup> Unwritten policy: first force Ms/Mrs, or Miss/Ms, options, and as Ms acclimatises, drop marriage distinctives Miss/Mrs: semantic deconstruction. The endgame *Ms* simply says that marriage doesn't matter, even if mutual consent does. Yet the new position is tenuous and temporary, since if *God* is an

fear that buddy theology songs are joining this fuzzy flow, closing down to God and his lordship.

Idle noted some other unhealthy trends. For example a drift from the spirit as a person who both helps & commands, to that of a more Star Warsy influence in the air. *"The spirit becomes a convenient motif embracing multi-faith, new-age, and do-it-yourself, philosophies; he, or (increasingly) she, is ignored no longer". "Fatherless' hymnals"* are being engineered in. Commendably, anti-drunkenness songs rightly condemn the cause of drunkenness, but various anti-HIV songs condone, not condemn, immoral sexual transmission of HIV: *"when they speak of hysteria, hatred and fear, we think we know who is being caricatured.... [But] it is like having a section of hymns devoted to lung cancer or road-accident victims, without any reference to possible causes."* Idle also noted a *"new stream of 'divorce' hymns"* in which the *"spirit' apparently releases us from old obligations and ties in the name of freedom and fulfillment,"* free love—meaning our worship of human emotions rather than obedience to Love himself. Objective truth is out. Westernism becomes the greedy sea which shall one day yield its dead. All this can flow from a buddy approach to God, a descent from lordship into the wishy-washy.

### Boyfriend Jesus

Then there are romanticising songs into girlfriend-boyfriend types. One blogger picked up a Vineyard song: *"no mention of God, Jesus, or the cross—just 'I' and 'You.' How is this a worship song to God? It could be me singing it to a girl!"* (lestyouforget).<sup>7</sup> Is Jesus our boyfriend? No. There must be clear blue water between God and girl/guy. Was *Let My Words Be Few*, co-attributed to Matt Redman's wife Beth, because he needed her permission to turn a song he'd written to her, into one written to Jesus? I'm not the first to ask, and yes, it is cheeky, yet it's asked to make a point. Matt acknowledged it wasn't ideal for church singing.<sup>8</sup> Too much syrupy sweet candy & not enough meat and potatoes, is bad for our health. What of Scott Haslem's (1999) *Keep Falling In Love?*<sup>9</sup>

Going C19, we have Horatius Bonar's I heard the voice of Jesus say... Lay down, thou weary one, lay down thy head upon my breast. It was probably based on a dubious translation, sadly kept in the NKJV of Jhn.13:25, that in today's ears makes John seem effeminate. (All the Russian guy to guy kissing in Tolstoy's *War & Peace*, can sound like that!) The cultural reality was that Jews lay on their sides at the low Passover table, and to whisper a question to a neighbour immediately behind you, you'd roll from your side to your back, then twist your head, to more or less face them. And in John's context, it was not about weariness, but about John's discreet enquiry about the betrayer's identity. It is extremely unlikely that *Jesus Boyfriend*, was Bonar's theme.

invalid or irrelevant concept, there is no absolute ground for *mutual consent*. To add international flavour, Ethiopia has Ato for Mr, Woizerit (Wzt) for Miss, and Woizero (Wzo) for Mrs: semantics recognises marriage—disrecognition is the vanguard of attack.

<sup>7</sup> <http://lestyouforget.wordpress.com/2008/04/11/bad-worship-songs>

<sup>8</sup> [www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFljv\\_wit4k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qFljv_wit4k)

<sup>9</sup> I am found in your embrace, covered by your love / Beyond my deepest dreams I know your love so strong, Spirit come [why?] / You lift me up to heaven's door, you restore my soul / I can't live without your touch, I need you so much, need you more / You're my rock and my redeemer / The rock on which I stand / I keep falling in love with you, Lord / Every beat of my heart, breath that I take / Through the seasons that change, your love remains / My hiding place, my home. Or Oneness Pentecostal Lanny Wolfe's (c1975), I keep falling in love with him over and over and over and over again / He gets sweeter and sweeter as the days go by / Oh what a love between my lord and I. To some extent someone's meat is someone's poison, since some are touchier than others. Loving God is to be enjoyed, but not perhaps the idea of frequently falling in (and therefore out) of love for him.

God is beyond biology, time, and space. Biology exists only within his creation, and for humanity has male/female expression, roughly synchronised to the nonsexual genders of masculine/feminine. Some languages have about 30 genders, linguistic markers (Don Carson's *The Inclusive Language Debate*, 1998:78). God is the fount of what we perceive to be masculinity and femininity, even though the incarnation for mission and identity, was incorporation into male humanity. Jesus had, and has, a male human body. The trouble is picturing Jesus as male (a biological aspect) and then romanticising. Thus, though there are many kinds of love, talk of loving him *can* sometimes sound like loving a male human being, along gender lines. Talk of *loving God* is safer, since it is more likely to come across along the same nonsexual lines as *loving humanity*. Some unmarried missionary women are told that Jesus will be their husband in place of any mortal man; nuns are oft called brides of Christ. Why not just as easily say that he, or perhaps *she*, will be the *wife* of single missionary men and of monks, and that to subsequently marry a mortal, a nun or missionary woman must first *divorce* Jesus? A point of *Genesis* is that God reckoned himself a poor substitute for an Eve, and that she was a poor substitute for him: neither should play *substitute*, but together should form a triangle of love: husband, wife, God. Whether married or not, of course, analogically a Christian man or women is somewhat like a bride enabled to bear spiritual fruit, but biblically the bridal image is retained for corporate entities (2 Cor.11:2). That is, he is husband to the global church, not to its individuals. Individuals are not the church in their individuality, only in their full togetherness, and form a church in the corporate togetherness.<sup>10</sup> A point of *Revelation* too, is that ultimately the expression *bride* is linked to the church over the millennia (Rv.19:7): the eschatological wedding supper. Jesus-Boyfriend songs might not be too dangerous, but I think they are silly and, to some, sickly.

Nor, I think, should we find refuge in the *Song of Songs/Canticles*. It has had a number of treatments. Some have even claimed to see Martin Luther's nose in 7:4! Some Judaics treat it allegorically as if between Yahweh and Ethnic Israel, and some Christians as between Jesus and the Church. Which side started that game? I think Tewoldemedhin Habtu was right to say that its primary message is in the surface reading. Namely, sexual desire as "*God-given and beautiful when practiced in the context of a heterosexual, [lifetime] committed, and loving relationship,*" with the possibility of a hidden spiritual-level of broad applicability (Adeyemo 2006:797). Similarly, the C4 monk Jovinian controversially argued that it typified a straightforward love story of celibacy previewing the joys of chaste marriage awaiting the lovers: this makes excellent sense.<sup>11</sup> My college's notes BS04 (OT Survey 1) cover *Songs* more.

I treat the Baby Jesus theme under Decontextualisation (see page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**), and give it a slight to middling demerit. Besides goo gahism, ideas of him still wearing Pampers yet prayed to, undermines true faith and evangelism.

<sup>10</sup> Only these two meanings of church are biblical. To call Christian networks *Church*, demands, IMO, repentance, whether Church of Rome, Church of the Nazarene, Elim Church, or Anglican Church. We exist within a false trajectory.

<sup>11</sup> Jovinian denied the ideas of Mary having remained a virgin after bearing Jesus, and argued that marriage was no less holy than the virginity of nuns (Chadwick 1995:76).