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Title: **Biblical Paradox and "I am" sayings in the Johannine Literature
A Critical Method toward the Analysis of Biblical Paradox of Circularity**

Author: Richard K. Min

Abstract:

The study of paradox has been one of the most neglected areas in contemporary biblical scholarship for the latter half of the 20th century. However, there has been a renewed interest due to the innovative approach and breakthrough pioneered by Kripke in the study of paradox of circularity. This paper explores and presents this new paradigm and critical method to understand and analyze biblical paradox of circularity, literary circular constructs, and "I am" sayings in the Johannine literature (John, 1 John, and Revelation). In this paper, the author explores this new paradigm in the study and analysis of biblical paradox of circularity, and proposes a critical method toward the analysis of biblical paradox of circularity and circular constructs.

Keywords: biblical paradox; circularity; I am; ego eimi; einai en; menein en; John; 1 John; Johannine literature

Comment: The Greek Text (NA27) in font of SBL Greek, and the Hebrew Text (BHS) in font of SBL Hebrew, are from BibleWorks 9. Unless otherwise noted, English biblical quotations are taken from the New International Bible (NIV) or my personal translation.

Author Information:

Richard K. Min
Professor – Paul Theological Seminary and Ko-Mex Mission, El Paso, Texas, USA.
Associate Professor, Taylor University, Indiana, USA

Address: 10519 Las Brisas Drive, Dallas, Texas 75243, USA
Telephone: 214-673-6657, email: min75243@hotmail.com

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Biblical Paradox and “I am” Sayings in the Johannine Literature

A Critical Method toward the Analysis of Biblical Paradox of Circularity

Richard K. Min

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1. Introduction

The study of paradox of circularity was pioneered by Russell (Irvine 2009) in the early 20th century. The scholarly consensus and trend following Russell was to exclude circular reasoning from formal logic, to treat it as “meaningless” (invalid or nonsense). The goal of Russell was to avoid paradox of circularity, for example, in the system of formal logic. Its intention was pragmatic, thus to keep the system of formal logic manageable at that time. This scholarly trend had set not only the direction and mainstream of formal logic but also it was soon to be followed by biblical scholarship to treat circular reasoning or self-reference as *ad absurdum*. The consequence of this mainstream trend has been somewhat devastating, especially in biblical scholarship (Basinger 1987; Santos 1994; Reymond 1998; Cryder 2001). However, there has been a renewed interest due to the innovative approach and breakthrough in the study of paradox of circularity pioneered by Kripke (1975). This new paradigm is one of the primary critical methods in this paper, to understand and analyze various paradoxes of circularity in the Bible.

This paper explores and presents this new perspective and paradigm, and its application to literary circular-constructs found in the Bible, especially in the Johannine literature. A brief survey of the selected examples of biblical paradoxes is presented and their characteristics are analyzed. Two proof methods for “I am” saying in John 8:12-18 is investigated and analyzed with this new insight. In this passage, Jesus’ testimony of “I am the light of the world” is distinctively based on his self-reference (circular reasoning). This observation provides a new interpretive basis and paradigm to “I am” sayings by Jesus in John. In John 10:1-39, two “I am” sayings of Jesus identify the true identity of the gate and the good shepherd in a metaphorical story (figure of speech) of John 10:1-5. With this understanding, it is noted that each predicated-metaphorical “I am” saying by Jesus in John functions as (self-identifying) interpretive key to the true identity of the central symbolic figure as each story being unfolded. Further various narrative patterns of the seven metaphorical “I am” sayings in John are analyzed, in order to provide a unifying framework. Various circular expressions with “I am” sayings in John (with circular be-in or abide-in relationships) are examined and analyzed. One classical example of circular be-in relationship in John is the identity of Jesus being in Father (John 14:10) who is in Jesus, presenting a paradox of circular in-relationship. The paradox of sinful-state versus sinless-state of Christian (1 John 1:8-10 versus 3:9 and 5:18) is analyzed and explained with respect to biblical paradox of circularity. Finally a critical method for the analysis of biblical paradox of circularity is presented as discussed in this paper.

The definition for the term “paradox” in biblical scholarship has been unsettled and controversial, far from scholarly consensus. Current working definition of (biblical) paradox (*παράδοξος*) in this paper is “contrary to opinion” of common sense, belief, or expectation (Liddell and Scott 1996). For example, the plural form of paradox (*παράδοξα*) is found in Luke 5:26, to denote an unusual event by Jesus in words and works. This definition is somewhat flexible and pragmatic to serve the purpose and scope of this paper, conservatively following the meaning of the early Greek and *Koine* Greek of the New Testament (Kittel 1964). Other meanings or similar notions for paradox found in the contemporary discussions (for example, mystery, apparent or actual self-contradiction) are briefly examined.

The terms of *circularity*, *cycle*, *infinite loop*, and *coinduction* are used informally and interchangeably in this paper, for a pragmatic reason. The reader is referred to Kripke (1975), Barwise and Moss (1996), Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998), Brewka *et al* (1997), Antoniou (1997), Min (2010), and Min and Gupta (2010) for an excellent introduction on circularity, coinduction, modal and nonmonotonic logic, and their applications in philosophy, computational logic, and biblical study.

For critical issues (of the Johannine literature on authorship, authenticity, textual, exegetical, and theological issues), the reader is referred to Morris (1969; 1986; 1989; 1995), Cullmann (1946; 1959; 1965), Tenney (1981), Ladd (1993), Ellis (1991; 1993), and Hoehner (1978). Further the author consulted the works of Dodd (1953), Brown (1966; 1982), Harner (1970), Hayward (1978), Creech (1985), Loader (1992), Evans (1993), and McDonough

(1999) for “I am” in John, Stott (1964) for 1 John, Malatesta (1978) for Interiority, Santos (1994) for biblical paradox, Longacre (1983), Porter (1995; 1997), and Levinsohn (2000) for discourse analysis and intertextuality, Cassuto (1961; 1967), and Kaiser (1978; 1995) for the Old Testament study. Quotations of biblical texts are from *Novum Testamentum Graece* (Aland *et al.* 1993) and *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Elliger *et al.* 1983). Unless otherwise noted, English biblical quotations are taken from the New International Bible (NIV) or from the translation by the author.

The approach of this paper is distinctively computational (Min 2010; Min and Gupta 2010; Min 2011). We believe that this approach provides the key to understanding biblical paradox of circularity. It is the author’s hope through this study to bring a renewed interest, understanding, and excitement toward the study of biblical paradox in the dawn of 21st century.

2. Selected Examples of Biblical Paradox

A few selected examples of biblical paradoxes are presented and examined for their circular constructions, along with their paradoxical features of modality or nonmonotonicity.

(1) Exodus 3:14

The first example is “I am who I am” (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה) from Exodus 3:14.

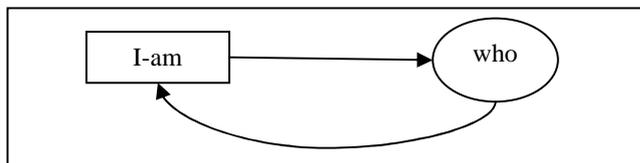


Figure 2.1 “I am who I am.” Exodus 3:14

In this example, a simple lexical (linguistic) or conceptual diagram clearly reveals its circular construct (I am who I am). A cycle (loop) is formed to reference itself (self-referencing). Its exact semantic meaning or interpretation is still debatable. However, one can easily see its circular meaning from the lexical or conceptual construct such as “I am who I am who I am who ...”. Further one may suggest its (logical or theological) meaning as the one who is (being of) self-defining, self-identifying, self-predicating, self-referencing, self-revealing, or even self-existing (that is, the living God who has no beginning and no end).

There are various patterns of self-referencing in the Bible. One noteworthy pattern is to define a concept by itself (self-referencing). For example, the good one brings out what is good (out of one’s own good) whereas the evil one brings out what is evil (out of one’s own evil) (ὁ ἀγαθὸς ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ θησαυροῦ ἐκβάλλει ἀγαθὰ, καὶ ὁ πονηρὸς ἄνθρωπος ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ θησαυροῦ ἐκβάλλει πονηρά in Matthew 12:35). Here the passage defines or characterizes a person with the very character or description that it tries to describe. This lexical pattern is also noted as “pleonastic relative clause modifying a noun to which its verb is cognate” (Hutchinson 2001) for John 5:32 and 17:26, and as “tautology” (Howard 1929) noting the patterns in the Old Testament (Zechariah 11:13; Jeremiah 19:2; Exodus 4:13; 1 Samuel 23:13; 2 Samuel 15:20; 2 Kings 8:1), along with many examples outside of the bible literatures.

(2) John 14:10–11

The second example is the text from John 14:10-11. This illustrates again a circular construct.

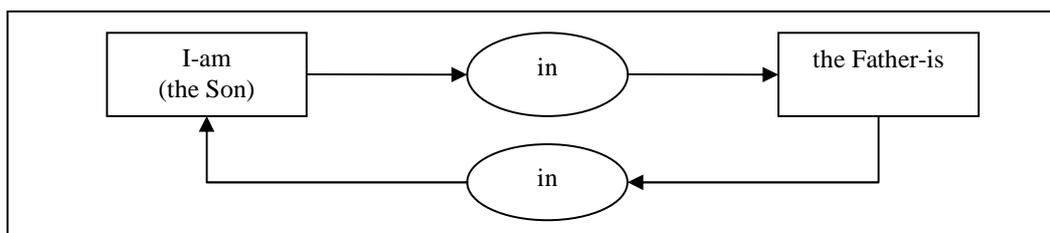


Figure 2.2 “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” in John 14:10

Here Jesus (the son) says: "I am in the Father and the father is in me." (John 14:10) and "The father is in me and I in him." (John 14:11). In contrast with the first example of "I am who I am", this construct is again circular with two concepts (persons) referencing each other (mutual-referencing) with a preposition ("in") of indwelling-relationship, creating a cycle. Further it should be noted that this circular in-relationship does not depict an identity-relationship (to claim that the father is the son and the son is the father).

(3) Titus 1:12

The third example is the well-known Liar's Paradox in Titus 1:12 (asserting about Cretans where even a prophet of their own said that the Cretans were always liars).

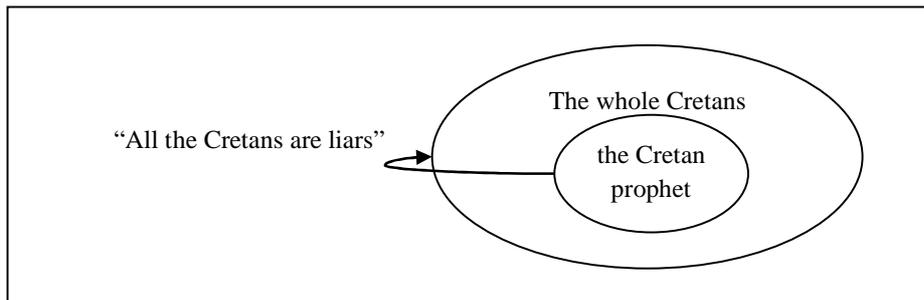


Figure 2.3 The Liar's Paradox in Titus 1:12

The problem is that the prophet himself is a Cretan, a member of the community of the whole Cretans (of the liars whose statement is false) to whom he is referring in his prophecy (which should be true). Thus the prophet is referring to himself (creating a paradox of circularity) by referring to the group of which he is a member. A paradoxical question is whether the prophet is a liar and thus whether his prophetic assertion (which is true) is a lie (false). This is a classical example of circular relationship dealing with a set and its member (that is, an element in the set) of "set-membership". One noteworthy and similar biblical example is found in 2 Timothy 3:16. Here Paul's letter which is a holy scripture (2 Timothy) refers to "all the scriptures" (that is, the canonic Bible yet to be completed) which includes the very scripture (2 Timothy, written in part and yet to be finished) and the very verse (2 Timothy 3:16) while Paul is writing. Moreover Paul himself made even a stronger assertion in Romans 3:4 that all human beings are liars (that is, including Paul as he is writing this very statement). There are many similar assertions of this type found throughout the Bible (for example, Psalm 116:10) which are essentially in circular reasoning with negation.

Another difficulty in the Liar's Paradox is the presence of negation in circular relationship. Further negation itself is not explicitly stated but negative implication is to be uncovered in this paradox. That is, a lie is a "false" statement (proposition) and a liar tells a lie all the time. Thus, negation in a circular reasoning presents not only a challenge but also it complicates the matter with respect to the understanding of its meaning and validity. Since the Cretan prophet asserts that all Cretans are liars, this Cretan prophet is then also a liar and thus to assert his own statement (the prophecy cited by Paul in Titus 1:12) to be a lie (that is, its truth-value to be "false"). In other words, it is the Cretan prophet whose prophecy (which is true and is even affirmed by the apostle Paul) denies truthfulness of a message of any Cretan (including himself) as a liar. If granted and extended, this line of reasoning further shakes the credibility of Paul's assertion of Titus 1:12 in Titus 1:13.

This line of reasoning seems to create a theological controversy in tension. However, one should also note that a liar needs not to tell a lie all the time. A liar may tell truth all the time except a few times to tell a lie. Further a chosen prophet may speak a true prophecy given by God (for one time, for example, in John 11:47-53). This shows one important feature of modal reasoning as one works with biblical paradox. There are many examples of paradoxical negations found in the biblical system of logic. For example, some noteworthy and more difficult examples found in Mark (Santos 1997) include: (1) self-denial (Mark 8:34), (2) saving-or-losing one's life (Mark 8:35), and (3) servant-leadership (Mark 9:35), along with many similar examples throughout the Bible.

(4) Matthew 22:23-33

The paradox of Matthew 22:23-33 is dealing with marriage and resurrection.

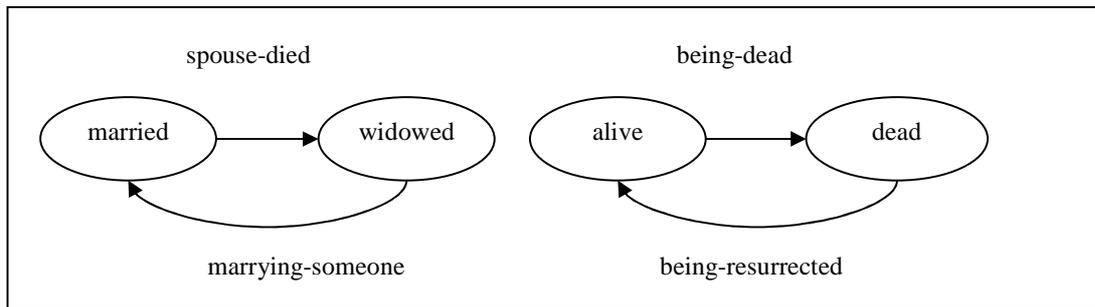


Figure 2.4 One’s Marital Status (being married or widowed) and Life-Status (being alive or dead)

The paradoxical question is constructed to trap one into an intellectual and theological deadlock and dilemma. There was no known solution to this paradoxical question until Jesus resolves it in Matthew 22:29–32. The question appears to demand either true or false answer of a logical dichotomy (of “either-or” with excluded-middle, but not “both-and” or “neither-nor”). Initially it seems so impossible to be resolved (that is, whose wife the woman would be) in this world of the living. But after all it seems so trivial to say “neither-nor” in that world of the resurrected. The marital (single, married, widowed, married, widowed, ..., married, widowed) and spousal (whose wife) attributes of the woman change time after time as well as her living-status (living, dead, and then resurrected). One may note her marital status in cycle, her life-status (being alive, dead, and then alive again after resurrection), and her husband-identity (from the first brother to none, to the second brother to none, ..., to the seventh brother to none, and then supposedly back to each brother after resurrection).

This aspect brings our attention to an additional and critical feature of this paradox for “nonmonotonic” reasoning. That is, the spousal attribute or the husband-identity of the woman is not monotonic (for one to be married and then to stay married) but nonmonotonic (from being married to be married again whereas the identity of her husband is changing seven times). Nonmonotonic reasoning is one of the most common motifs and themes in the Bible (for example, Ecclesiastes 3:1-10; 7:14), seemingly contradictory with respect to monotonic reasoning or principle. If the righteous are blessed and the evil are cursed (as in monotonic reasoning), then why a righteous man is to be cursed or persecuted (as in nonmonotonic reasoning). Some classical examples in the Bible would be the case of Job (Job 1-2) or Christian who is blessed “to be cursed” (Matthew 5:10-12). Another way to look at nonmonotonic reasoning is that it deals with not only what is true (that is, monotonic) but also what is false. The reader is referred to Brewka *et al* (1997) and Antoniou (1997) for an excellent technical introduction.

(5) Matthew 22:41–46

The paradox in Matthew 22:41-46 extends the number of the constituents in a cycle.

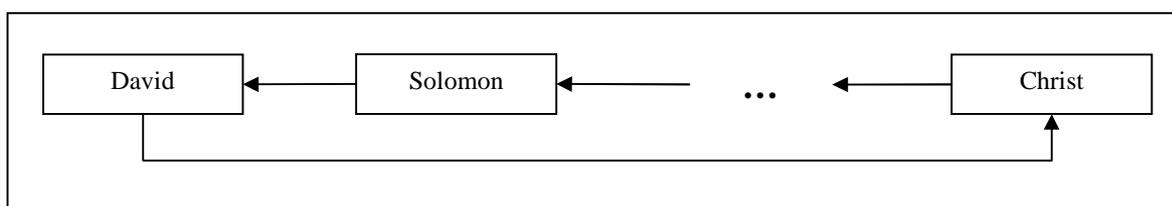


Figure 2.5 Lord-Servant relationship from David to Christ (who is a son of David) in Matthew 22:41– 46

This example deals with the extended “Father-Son” relationship which is compatible with “Lord-Servant” relationship. A father (who is also a king) is the lord (master) of his own son (servant). This “Father-Son” relationship is extending to his son’s sons. That is, the relationship is transitive as to an immediate “Ancestor-Descendant” relationship where “Father” is also referred to as one’s “Ancestor-Father” in a direct blood-lineage in the biblical context. Then the question is why David called Christ (who is his own descendent) “my lord” in Psalm 110:1. This clearly illustrates a circular relationship to signify “You are my Lord” (that is, “Lord-Servant”) relationship, counterintuitive to the intended “Father-Son” relationship from David to Christ. As one may note in this example, some of these circular relationships may not be clear at lexical or syntactic level but may require a further analysis to derive circular relationship at semantic level.

In summary, we have surveyed and analyzed five noteworthy and exemplary biblical paradoxes. Each paradox represents its own type (class) of biblical paradox, presenting a diverse and complex array of biblical paradox of circularity. A circular construct (to form a conceptual cycle of a circular relationship) can be seen at lexical, syntactic, or semantic level, and further adding a layer of complexity with negation. A cycle can be constructed with (1) one concept (person, object, or attribute) in self-referencing (as in Exodus 3:14), (2) two concepts in mutual-reference in cycle (as in John 14:10), (3) many concepts in a cycle (as in Matthew 22:41–46), (4) one concept (an element) referring to a set (or a group) of which the concept is a member (as in Titus 1:12), and (5) a cycle with imbedded negation. Some of the key characteristics (features) of biblical paradoxes are: (1) circularity, (2) modality, and (3) nonmonotonicity. Finally there are so many diverse patterns (types) of biblical paradoxes in the Bible, yet to be discovered and explored. The current list of these paradoxes and features in this paper are far away from being complete or exhaustive, but to be explored and expanded in future study.

3. Two Proof Methods in John 8:12-20

The noteworthy example of inductive and coinductive reasoning used in the Bible is found in John 8:12-20. Here Jesus claims himself that “I am the light of the world” (Ἐγώ εἰμι τὸ φῶς τοῦ κόσμου ... in John 8:12). Jesus was accused by the Pharisees (σὺ περὶ σεαυτοῦ μαρτυρεῖς· ἡ μαρτυρία σου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθῆς in John 8:13) of the self-testimony (claiming himself as “I am the light of the world”) which is indeed a circular (coinductive) reasoning. Further Jesus defends himself for his self-testimony (κἂν ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἑμαυτοῦ, ἀληθῆς ἔστιν ἡ μαρτυρία μου ...) in John 8:14. In addition, Jesus provides an inductive testimony citing two witnesses according to the Law in his defense (καὶ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ δὲ τῷ ὑμετέρῳ γέγραπται ὅτι δύο ἀνθρώπων ἡ μαρτυρία ἀληθῆς ἔστιν. ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ μαρτυρῶν περὶ ἑμαυτοῦ καὶ μαρτυρεῖ περὶ ἐμοῦ ὁ πέμψας με πατήρ in John 8:17-18).

First (1), using coinductive reasoning (John 8:12) Jesus declare his self-testimony with his justification (John 8:14) which is valid even if he testifies on his own behalf. Further Jesus provides the basis (of his self-testimony to be valid). It is based on his own supernatural and omniscient knowledge about himself to know where he came from and where he is going. In contrast to his own defense and qualification, Jesus qualifies further that they (the accusers) do not know where Jesus came from or where Jesus is going. This claim further reveals that Jesus knows not only their inner thoughts (John 2:24-25) but also their origin and destination (John 8:44).

Second (2), using inductive reasoning (John 8:17) Jesus provides two witnesses (the Father and the Son himself) for the requirement imposed by the Law (Deuteronomy 19:15). Interestingly the accused (Jesus) himself is also qualified as a witness to defend himself. The accusers take at least the part of Jesus but then seek the claimed second witness (the father of Jesus) to be in a witness stance (John 8:19). It is clear that the accusers take both witnesses (Jesus and his father) as mere human beings. Later we find that there is at least one more witness (John 9:29-33) willing to stand up in the witness stance. He is the man born blind but healed by Jesus. He boldly comes forward to testify for Jesus about who Jesus is (John 9:17) and where Jesus came from (John 9:30-33).

From this perspective, one may understand the four witnessing agents as testimony and evidence for Jesus in John 5:31-39. These are: (1) John the baptist who is a prophet (Isaiah 39:3-9; John 1:19-37), (2) the work (the miracles as the sign) of Jesus as the signs, (3) the Father (John 1:33-34; 12:28), and (4) the Scriptures (as the system of prophecy to be fulfilled). It is sufficient to present another individual (e.g., John the baptist or the Father) along with Jesus himself, to defend his claim, as required by the Law (as noted in John 8:17). As acknowledged or challenged according to the Law, it is necessary (1) to be heard of both sides in a dispute for a fair trial (Deuteronomy 1:16-17) and (2) to be validated according to the Scripture (Deuteronomy 18:21-22, also noted in John 7:51-52), by presenting the miracles as the “divine” signs and means to authenticate one’s claim (also noted by Jesus in John 10:25, 38).

First (1), we note the two conflicting statements by Jesus in John 5:31 versus John 8:16, with respect to the validity (truth) of his own self-testimony. In John 5:31, Jesus denies the validity of his own self-testimony “according to the Law”. This legal compliance is always challenged by the Pharisees (John 8:13), thus to be complied (John 8:17) for Jesus as being a “mere human being” (John 10:33), even at the expense (or in the gross negligence) of many miracles done by Jesus. In contrast to John 5:31, in John 8:16 Jesus affirms the validity of his own self-testimony on the basis of the divine authority. Thus, in these multi-modal layers (one according to the Law and the other of the divine self-reference), one may resolve the seemingly-contradicting claims in John 5:31 versus John 8:14 where each claim has a valid model in its own modal dimension (human or divine) to be true, respectively. As noted previously (for example, in Matthew 22:23-33), a set of two contradicting interpretations (models or model set)

could be valid.

Second (2), we note that circular reasoning (coinductive reasoning) can be used as a sound method of reasoning or logic (just as induction as a sound method of proof). However, if an assumption or material (testimony or witness) of the argument (proof or reasoning) is invalid (whether it is inductive or coinductive), then the whole argument and thus the proof itself is invalid even though the proof method itself (whether it is inductive or coinductive) is correctly applied. For example, if a stranger says to me, "Trust me with all of your money and your life". I should guard myself to challenge him to prove it. That is, an unwarranted plain response (of "simply because I say so" from a stranger) is not good enough to be a credible proof for any cautious human being, for the entrustment of his life and all of his fortune.

There is a close parallel between John 8:12-19 and Exodus 3:14-15 with respect to the two proof methods in usage. In Exodus 3:14, God testifies (reveals or identifies) himself with respect to himself. This is clearly a coinductive (circular) proof method (reasoning). In Exodus 3:15, God testifies (reveals or identifies) himself by referencing the most credible three witnesses (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob). They are not only the founding fathers of the people of Israel but also the living witnesses of the living God (Matthew 22:32). This is clearly an inductive proof method (reasoning). Further this parallel between Exodus 3:14-15 and John 8:12-19 may suggest or even enhance some of the intriguing arguments by Zickendraht (1922), Harner (1970), Hayward (1978), and McDonough (1999) for "I am" in John as the divine (personal) name of God in Exodus 3:14-15.

Similar provision for the proof method in the authentication process is explicitly stated and mandated (Deuteronomy 18:21-22) for a safeguard against false testimony (Exodus 20:16). One may find many biblical examples for the "challenge-response" model or "identification-authentication" model of security, for example, for the identity and proof of Christ (John 1:19-27; 6:30) and toward the secure model of revelation. Thus the secure system of the biblical reasoning and revelation warrants the challenge-response model, using the "sign" as one of the most prominent proof methods in the Bible (Deuteronomy 18:19-22; Isaiah 7:10-17; John 20:30-31). This elevates the necessity and interest toward the biblical concept of "sign" as a proof method in the "identification and authentication" process (cf. John 2:11). One may find the stages or the process of the faith (for example, of Peter in John) in formation, growth, and maturity through (1) an indirect but a credible personal testimony of one's teacher and prophet (John 1:35-42), (2) a direct and personal self-experience of the unshakable "sign" as a proof (John 2:11), (3) a doubt and controversy (John 6:60-71), (4) a confirmation of the faith (John 16:29-31), (5) the ultimate shake-and-break test (John 13:36-38 and 16:32-33 for John 18:25-27), and (6) the commencement (John 21:15-18).

One may extend the contemporary view and scope of paradox beyond the literary genre of discourse and rhetoric into the realm of action. Then one may view the miraculous signs in the Bible under the category of paradox "in action" to extend the definition of paradox, as it is either in word or in work (as noted in Luke 5:26). Moreover the secure communication system is also found in the case of the biblical dream-vision and its interpretation. For example, a dream is used as a secure means of transmission of a hidden message to a particular person who may or may not know its hidden message at the time of conception. It is then to be interpreted, only by a qualified or authenticated secure interpreter to reveal its hidden message securely, thus effectively protecting its trust system (cf. 2 Peter 3:16). Some of the classical and well-known examples of the secure dream-vision model are found in Genesis 40-41, Daniel 2 and 4, and Matthew 1:20-25 and 2:19-21.

The secure system of the biblical message and communication is thus found to be applicable to biblical paradox as (1) a means of bringing out a hidden message and divine wisdom, sealed in or through the expressed paradox, and (2) through identification and authentication of wise divine messenger (interpreter) sent by God. The paradoxical examples in Matthew 22:15-46 clearly demonstrate the model of the secure biblical message and communication. Whether a paradox is used by those who are not aware of its hidden message (that is, its solution to a question and query of the paradox) and the one who knows both (that is, a paradox as a question and its answer), begging for its hidden (theological) message to be disclosed, explained, revealed, and thus its paradoxical quest to be completed (as a unit of discourse or narrative).

Similar to the biblical dreams or parables, one may find the biblical model of the paradox (1) to be applied as the secure message and communication, (2) with a motif of wisdom and paradigm-shift and (3) as an offensive and shock-wave rhetoric device to provoke a storm of crisis and conflict, (4) with a mind-boggling and controversial question (seemingly so naïve at first sight, but so profound theologically in reality after all), (5) with an impending

suspension and thrill followed by a breath-taking silence of the audience waiting for a triumphant moment of victory or defeat (for a glory or a shame), (6) to reveal a hidden divine wisdom through a seemingly so effortless resolution and novel answer for the paradox as theological challenge and quest, (7) to identify and authenticate the divine wisdom teacher (sage), and (8) for praise to the wisdom and authority of God, with wonder and amazement.

As a discourse model and means of rhetoric, biblical paradox generates a series of life-and-death crisis and conflict, breath-taking suspension and thrill, unexpected resolution and enlightening excitement, and out-bursting joy and praising finale through stimulation and unrest among the intellectuals (cf. Ecclesiastes 9:5 or Proverbs 30:4, with John 3:3-10). Further one may find the discourse model of “question-answer” in all three paradoxical examples in Matthew 22:15-46, concluded by the overwhelming response to reveal and demonstrate the divine wisdom and biblical authority through a divine messenger to reveal the hidden message. In this regard, one may find a unifying motif and theme of the biblical revelation as the “secret” and “mystery”, hidden (even before the creation of the world) then but now revealed and known (Matthew 13:35 with Psalms 78:2, and Romans 16:25-26). This motif is not only inherent in the distinctive genre of parable, dream-vision, and paradox, but also clear and abundant in the prophetic writings (for example, Psalm 110:1 with Matthew 22:41-46). Some of the well-known and landmark (paradoxical) examples of “mystery” (hidden but now revealed and known in the New Testament) include: (1) the mystery of God in Christ (Colossians 2:2), (2) the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ (Romans 16:25-27), (3) the mystery of God’s will, set before the creation (Ephesians 1:9), and (4) the mystery of the corporate unity and relationship of Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:29-32).

Finally, the majority of “I am” claim-sayings by Jesus in John should be taken as self-identification, self-predication, self-reference, self-witnessing, or self-testimony. This is also noticed and accused by the Pharisees (for example, in John 8:13). There are a few cases (for examples, John 5:31-39 and John 8:17-18), where the evidences according to the Law (other than one’s own testimony itself) are provided. This conclusion leads the author to examine and evaluate “I am” sayings (and its variants) by Jesus in John, with respect to circular and coinductive reasoning (of self-reference) whether it is said with or without (metaphoric) predicate.

4. “I am” Sayings in John

One distinctive narrative-feature of John is the abundant usage of the first person pronoun (ἐγώ) and the “I am” phrase (ἐγώ εἰμι), narrated by Jesus. The first personal pronoun is used 156 times in John (including 29 instances of κἀγώ), and 141 times by Jesus. In contrast, Matthew uses the pronoun 36 times in total and 21 times by Jesus, Mark uses 16 times in total and 10 times by Jesus, and Luke uses 21 times in total and 14 times by Jesus. There are three major patterns of “I am” sayings in John: (1) absolute (that is, without predicate) for self-identification or self-predication, (2) with a predicate, and (3) with an understood predicate.

Some noteworthy absolute “I am” sayings by Jesus are found in John 8:24, 28, 58; 13:19 (Harner 1970) where some of the noteworthy predicate “I am” sayings are found in John 6:35, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5. These are so called seven metaphorical “I am” sayings by Jesus in John: (1) I am the bread of life (John 6:35, 51), (2) I am the light of the world (John 8:12), (3) I am the door (the gate) of the sheep (John 10:7, 9), (4) I am the good shepherd (John 10:11, 14), (5) I am the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), (6) I am the way, and the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and (7) I am the true vine (John 15:1, 5).

As noted by the Pharisees in John 8:13, all of these seven metaphorical “I am” sayings are essentially self-testimonies of Jesus. Moreover the majority of these “I am” sayings of Jesus (whether absolute or predicate) is used as self-identification, self-predication, self-testimony, or self-reference, as discussed earlier, thus in circular (coinductive) reasoning. Thus the following discussion shall focus primarily on those seven predicate “I am” sayings (with the divine metaphors commonly found in the Old Testament).

Further some variations of “I am” sayings in John are presented and analyzed, including those variations called “impure” forms of “I am”. One of the impure forms is “I (am) in” where a static “be” verb is missing (or understood) where one noteworthy example is the mutual in-relationship as Jesus says that “I (am) in the Father and the Father (is) in me” (ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοί) in John 14:11. A few other variations of circular in-relationship are also considered to current discussion (for example, “the word” (John 8:31, 37) or “the truth” (John 8:44) are used in circular relationship). For detailed and scholarly account of “I am” sayings in John, the reader is referred to Hendricksen (1953), Dodd (1953), Brown (1966; 1982), Morris (1969; 1986; 1989; 1995), Harner (1970), Hayward (1978), Malatesta (1978), and McDonough (1999).

4.1. “I am” as Interpretive Key

Two metaphorical “I am” sayings are found in John 10:1–18. The discourse begins with a metaphorical story (in teaching or proclamation) in figure of speech (*παροιμία* – parable, proverb, or riddle) in John 10:1-5. For a convenience and practical reason, the metaphorical story in John 10:1-5 is denoted as a “parable” for now. The discourse begins with a distinctive “amen, amen” introductory opening statement by Jesus (John 10:1), uniquely observed in John. As usual, the audience does not understand the meaning of the parable (that is, its hidden and intended message). Noting the audience’s inability to understand (in John 10:6), Jesus provides a key (an aid to the audience) to unlock (decode) the part of the hidden message (meaning or interpretation) of the parable, using “I am” (*ἐγώ εἰμι*) as the key to the “partial” and “modal” solution (interpretation) of the parable.

The first key is: “I am” the gate, to the true identity of the gate (John 10:7). The second key is: “I am” the good shepherd, to the true identity of the good shepherd (John 10:11). First (1), it is distinctively a modal approach to allow possibly more than one interpretive solution. Second, there are still many metaphorical figures in the parable whose true identity is yet to be disclosed or still undisclosed (for example, who is the gatekeeper, the sheep, the thieves, the hiring, or the wolf in the story). Thus these two keys do not provide the “complete” solution (interpretation) of the parable in John 10:1-5 but a partial solution (interpretation). Further we note a few distinctive features of the parable presented in John 10:1-5 and then its interpretation in John 10:7-18 (in contrast to the presentation and interpretation of the parables used in the synoptic gospels). For example, the parable of seed-sower in Matthew 13:3-9 (in a fixed and static content) with its “full” interpretation in Matthew 13:18-23 provides an exemplary case to be compared with the parable and its interpretation in John 10:1-18.

First (1), the parable in John 10:1-5 is explained (interpreted) with the first-person key of “I am” to reveal the hidden or intended meaning. In contrast, the figures in the synoptic parables and their interpretations are almost always in “third-person” (and rarely in the “second-person” metaphorical figure of speech, as noted in Matthew 5:13-16). The central teaching of Jesus in Matthew 13 is focused on Kingdom of God (Ladd, 1993) whereas the central focus of the “I am” sayings of Jesus in John is placed upon Jesus himself in Christology (Brown, 1966).

Second (2), the parable in John 10:1-18 is interpreted “partially” and “to the general audience”. In contrast, the parable in Matthew 13:3-9 is interpreted “completely” and “to the disciples only” in Matthew 13:18-23 as noted in Matthew 13:10-17.

Third (3), the parable in John 10:1-18 is “unfolding”, as it is being interpreted with the keys, by expanding or adding to the story of the parable with further “parabolic” materials (blended with the intended message), in a continuous and dynamic narrative-frame. In contrast to John 10:1-18, two stages (phases) of (a) the presentation and (b) the interpretation of a parable are usually clearly marked and distinguishable. Thus the content of a parable in scope is mostly fixed (or static) to be interpreted, and exclusively to the disciples only (Matthew 13:10-13).

Finally (4), the effect of the rhetoric process (framework) of parable in John 10:1-18 generates “catastrophic” offense, controversy, and disturbance among the general audience (for example, in John 10:19-21), and (b) with no understanding or a postponed (time-delayed) understanding of the disciples with some provisional remarks (for example, in John 3:22; 4:27; 6:60, 67-71). In contrast, the effect and outcome of parable in the synoptic gospels is mostly (a) no understanding with a calming effect (with a sense of puzzling) to the general audience, and (b) a significant teaching and learning taking place with Jesus and the disciples in the inner circle (for example, Matthew 13:10-17, 36; 14:51; 15:15; 16:6-12; 17:10-13).

This pattern is also clearly observed in John 6. First (1), Jesus claims himself as the bread of the life (John 6:35) using “I am” as the key to unlock the story of “the true bread of God” from the heaven, who gives life to the world (John 6:31-34). (It may be better to classify this case as typological.) Second (2), Jesus uses the partial interpretation of the parable to his audience, thus inviting to eat his flesh (where it is meant to receive his word as explained in John 6:63). Third (3), Jesus expands the parable of the bread of the life (as his flesh) to be eaten and with the living water (as his blood) to be drunk (John 6:35). Thus (4), this rhetoric process and framework (blending of real and symbolic concepts) generates a catastrophic confusion, disturbance, and controversy, especially among the Jews as noted in John 6:41, 52, 60, 66) as the story is being unfolded with the partial interpretation and the additional materials in metaphor.

This new perspective provides a fresh new insight to the understanding of the metaphorical “I am” sayings of Jesus in John. These “I am” sayings are used as the keys to reveal the true identity of the metaphorical figures, presented in the form of self-claim by Jesus. These “I am” metaphorical figures include: the bread of the life, the living water, the gate of the sheep, and the good shepherd.

There is an array of somewhat similar (yet different) presentations of the metaphorical “I am” sayings, in contrast to John 6:31-71 and John 10:1-18, found in John 8:12 (“I am” the light of the world), John 11:25 (“I am” the resurrection and the life), John 14:6 (“I am” the way and the truth and the life), and John 15:1 (“I am” the true vine).

First (1), there is no preceding parable (that is, a metaphorical story or a proverbial teaching in figure of speech), in an explicit form as noted in John 10:1-5 or John 6:31-34. However, a real-life case (experience as a story) is used to support the self-claim of Jesus. For example, (a) the self-claim of “I am” the light of the world (John 8:12) is clearly substantiated with the story of a man born blind to gain his sight (in John 9) and (b) the self-claim of “I am” the resurrection and the life (John 11:25) is clearly manifested with the dead Lazarus to be resurrected (in John 11). Second (2), the message of “I am” saying is encountered with various responses and reactions varying from hostility to loyalty (to be accused in John 8:13 or to be affirmed in John 11:27). Third (3), the discourse in John 8:12-59 is engaged by Jesus and the Jews in hostility and aggression, with the catastrophic outcome to kill Jesus. In contrast, the discourses in John 11, John 14, and John 15 are engaged by Jesus and his disciples, with their faith to be enhanced as a result. Finally (4), the setting of the discourse in John 8:12-59 is totally open in public. In contrast, the setting of the discourse in John 14-15 is that of intimate and closed fellowship whereas the setting of John 11:25 is in public but the “I am” saying by Jesus is addressed to one person (Martha) in particular.

The message of “I am” the light of the world in John 8:12 has been relatively well-understood by the audience (the Jews) to be challenged and accused of being self-claim (in contrast to John 6:41, 6:52, 6:60, 6:66). The rich thematic topics in John 8:12-59 are observed with an array of the dualistic (mutually-negating, bipolar) concepts of (a) light versus darkness, (b) life versus death, (c) freedom in the Son versus slavery under the sin, (d) truth versus lie, and (e) God the Father versus Devil the Father.

This concludes a brief survey of the metaphorical “I am” sayings in John. As noted, there are two classes of the metaphorical “I am” sayings in John. The first class consists of the metaphorical “I am” sayings with a preceding metaphorical (or typological) story of which the identity (of the key figure or object) is to be interpreted (or revealed) with “I am” as the key, as noted in John 6:31-34 (with John 6:35-71) and John 10:1-5 (with John 10:6-18). The second class (pattern) consists of the metaphorical “I am” sayings without a preceding metaphorical story. The metaphorical story is not narrated explicitly. However, the story is assumed to be well-known to the audience (as a background theory or a common sense). Therefore, it seems that there is no need for Jesus to repeat the story but to reveal the true identity of the key figure of the well-known story with “I am” as the key.

We note this pattern recurring in John 8:12 (“I am” the light of the world), John 11:25 (“I am” the resurrection and the life), John 14:6 (“I am” the way and the truth and the life), and John 15:1 (“I am” the true vine). All of these keys (or key-figures) are well-known to the audience with their familiarity to the Old Testament stories (in metaphor or in history). Some of the well-known examples of the metaphoric stories or typological figures in the Old Testament with the metaphorical “I am” sayings in John include: (a) the bread of God in John 6:35 with Exodus 16:15, (b) the light of the world in John 8:12 with Psalm 36:9, Isaiah 9:1-3 (also noted in Matthew 4:14-16), or Isaiah 42:6-7, and (c) the good shepherd in John 10:11 with Psalm 23, Isaiah 40:10-11, Jeremiah 23:1-6, Ezekiel 34:11-16, or Zechariah 13:7. Finally the metaphorical “I am” sayings are essentially used in self-reference (coinductive reasoning) where a statement of the metaphorical “I am” saying is said by Jesus in self-reference to himself.

4.2. “I am” In-relationship

One variant lexical pattern of “I am” (ἐγώ εἰμι) sayings in John is “I (am) in” (ἐγὼ ἐν) with the preposition “in” (without an expected static verb “be”). The lexical pattern is commonly found in John with “the father” as in “I (am) in the father”, and used together side by side as the matching pattern of “the father (is) in me” (for example, ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἐν ἐμοί ... in John 14:10-11, to illustrate a circular construct). This lexical construct is clearly circular with two concepts (two persons) referencing each other (dual-referencing) with “be-in” relationship. Two concepts (“I” and “the father”) are connected with a preposition (“in”) to create a cycle.

One may wonder what would be theological implication of this circular in-relationship (perhaps that of mutual indwelling in ontological perspective). Moreover a very close relationship is noted between (a) the circular in-relationship of the father and the son (ἐν ἐμοὶ ὁ πατήρ καὶ ἐγὼ ἐν τῷ πατρὶ in John 10:38) and (b) the oneness of the father and the son (ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πατήρ ἓν ἐσμεν in John 10:30). As being challenged and accused by the Jews (John 5:18, 10:33), one may note (a) the “equality” of the Father and the Son (ἴσον ἑαυτὸν ποιῶν τῷ θεῷ in John 5:18), and even (b) to make or claim oneself to be God (σὺ ἄνθρωπος ὧν ποιεῖς σεαυτὸν θεόν in John 10:33), even possibly to the personal “identity” of God himself as being accused. However, it should be noted that the son (Jesus) never identifies himself as the Father himself throughout John (that is, for his personal identity). In contrast, Jesus keeps his self-testimony of asserting that (a) he is in the Father and the Father is in him (John 14:10-11), (b) he and the Father are one (John 17:11, 22), and (c) the Father is greater than him (ὁ πατήρ μείζων μου ἐστὶν in John 14:28).

This pair-relationship (of father-son) of circularity (in-relationship) and oneness (one-relationship) is also expressed in John 17:21–23, with the second pair-relationship (of son-disciples), in parallel. The disciples as “one” are to be in the father-son as “one” (ἐν). Based on the in-relationships (in John 14:10, 20), one may note the two circular relationships (consisting of three entities of the Father, the Son, and the disciples) linked with the Son in the center (as a critical connection between two circles) where (a) the Father is in the Son and the Son is in the Father and (b) the Son is in the disciples and the disciples are in the Son. There is no explicit expression found in John for the Father “being or to be in” the disciples, or vice versa (but found in 1 John 3:24; 4:12–15), also noted by Malatesta (1978). In addition, it is “we” (the father and the son) as one to be in “them” (the disciples) as “they” (the disciples) are to be one.

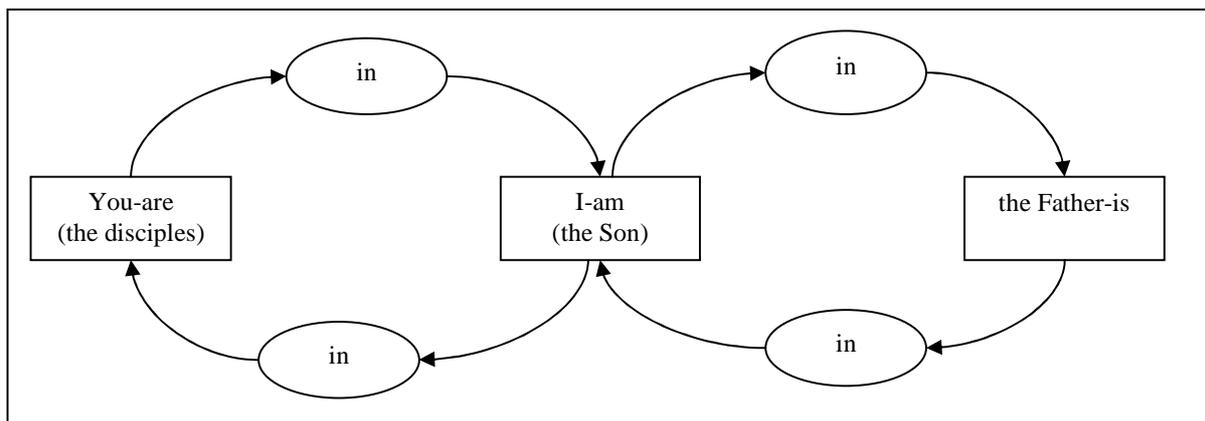


Figure 4.1 Two circular in-relationships of the Father-Son and Son-Disciples (John 14:10, 20 and John 17:21-23)

Along with “be” verb, the verb “dwell” (or “abide” or “remain” as in ὁ μένων ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ in John 15:5, similarly in John 6:56 and 14:23) is also used for this in-relationship. These textual evidences suggest that the in-relationship and one-relationship of the father-son have been already established, pre-existing, permanent, and intrinsic (cf. John 1:1-3, 18) whereas the in-relationship and oneness of the disciples are yet to be established (or ongoing to be completed as one flock in John 10:16; 17:20, 22), fulfilled, and conditional (John 14:23; 17:11, 20, 21-23). Further there is a strong connection between “the works of Jesus” and “the pair-relationship of being-one and being-in of the Father and Jesus (the Son)” (John 10:25, 37; 14:10, 11). Similarly a dual-circular relationship connected with the verb “know” (γινώσκω) is found in John 10:14-15 (Εγὼ εἶμι ὁ ποιμὴν ὁ καλὸς καὶ γινώσκω τὰ ἐμὰ καὶ γινώσκουσί με τὰ ἐμὰ, καθὼς γινώσκει με ὁ πατήρ καὶ ἐγὼ γινώσκω τὸν πατέρα ...) which is also complete in cycle as noted by Dodd(1953). This is one of seven metaphorical “I am” sayings of Jesus that (1) Jesus (the good shepherd) knows his sheep and his sheep knows Jesus as (2) Jesus (the son) knows the Father and the Father knows Jesus the son.

The third person (in addition to the Father and the Son) in this in-relationship with the disciples is the Spirit of Truth (τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς ἀληθείας ... ὅτι παρ’ ὑμῖν μένει καὶ ἐν ὑμῖν ἐστὶν in John 14:17) who is the Holy Spirit (John 14:26). There is no clear expression of “in the (Holy) Spirit” found in John to provide the other side of the circular in-relationship of the Holy Spirit with the disciples. However, there are abundant examples with the metaphor of the living temple of God in which the Holy Spirit of God dwells (τὸ σῶμα ὑμῶν ναὸς τοῦ ἐν ὑμῖν ἁγίου πνεύματος ἐστὶν in 1 Corinthians 6:19), as its building (the living temple of God) currently in progress (Ephesians 2:22). All of the

disciples of Jesus are baptized into one body by (or in) one Spirit (ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι ἡμεῖς πάντες εἰς ἓν σῶμα ἐβαπτίσθημεν) in 1 Corinthians 12:13. A similar metaphor of drinking (of the blood of Jesus) in John 6:35 is also found here in 1 Corinthians 12:13 with the metaphor of drinking (Holy) Spirit (καὶ πάντες ἐν πνεύμα ἐποτίσθημεν).

The “I am” in-relationship consists of a pair-concept of two persons, being connected with “be” or “dwell” in-relationships. However, there are a few variations of in-relationship in John. The first variation (John 8:31, 37) consists of the pair-concept of (1) an impersonal object of “my word” (ὁ λόγος ὁ ἐμὸς) and (2) a person of “you” (ὕμεῖς), connected with (3) “dwell” in-relationship (μείνητε ἐν in John 8:31) or “have-place” in-relationship (χωρεῖ ἐν in John 8:37). Here the in-relationship signifies the true discipleship (ἀληθῶς μαθηταὶ μου in John 8:31). A similar pattern is found in John 15:17 (ἐὰν μείνητε ἐν ἐμοὶ καὶ τὰ ῥήματά μου ἐν ὑμῖν μείνη). Another variation (in John 8:44) consists of the pair-concept of (1) “truth” (ἀλήθεια) and (2) a person, connected with (3) “stand” and “be” in-relationships (ἐν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ οὐκ ἔστηκεν, ὅτι οὐκ ἔστιν ἀλήθεια ἐν αὐτῷ).

One intriguing question is: what relationship may exist between “I am” in-relationship and these various other in-relationships. One passage in John 6:56 may provide a hint to solve this question. Anyone (who receives the word of Jesus) metaphorically eats the flesh of Jesus and drinks the blood of Jesus, resulting in the circular in-relationship between Jesus and that person. The metaphor of eating and drinking of Jesus is meant (as implied in John 6:58, 63, 68) to receive (believe) in the word of Jesus which is truth (John 8:46). This process and model of various circular in-relationships in John may provide further additional insight to the current conventional wisdom and intuitive understanding on the process and model of “believe”, traditionally understood as subjective-willful action of a person to believe.

Finally there is one more circular relationship worthy to be noted. It is a circular relationship of “love” (in John 14:21, 23, 27, 31; 15:9; 16:27; 17:23) which turns out to be complete (with no missing link) between Jesus (the son), the Father, and the disciple(s) of Jesus.

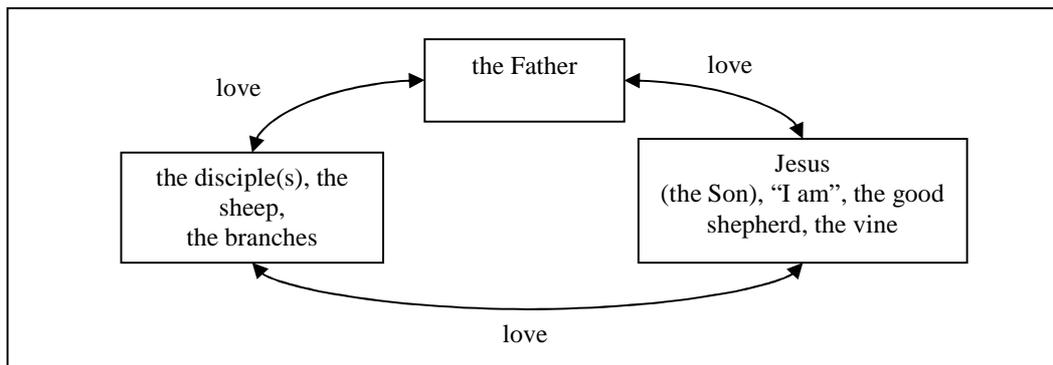


Figure 4.2 Circular love-relationships between Jesus, the Father, and the disciple(s) of Jesus in John

Concluding current investigation on “I am” sayings and circular in-relationships in John, next we extend our study to the rest of the Johannine literature (the Johannine Epistles and the Revelation of John), following the extensive work by Malatesta (1978) and Brown (1982) on “be-in” and “abide-in” relationships in the Johannine literature.

5. Circularity in the Johannine Epistles and the Revelation of John

A brief survey on the Johannine Epistles and the Revelation reveals a few interesting patterns with respect to “I am” sayings and (circular) in-relationship (Malatesta 1978; Brown 1982). First (1), the metaphorical “I am” saying as noted in John is observed only in the Revelation (1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13). Second (2), the circular in-relationships (of “be-in” and “dwell-in”) are observed only in the Johannine Epistles (especially in 1 John). These patterns are somewhat expected with the corresponding literary genre of each book. For example, 1 John is an epistolary work where John himself as the author writing in first-person monologue, expressing and reflecting his own understanding of God the father and his son (as both persons are expressed in third person), addressing to his fellow Christian brothers. In the Johannine epistles, there is no intervening external event or engaging multi-person discourse (contrast to John or the Revelation). The Revelation is a prophetic and apocalyptic document (Revelation 1:1; 22:18–19) with a vivid eye-witnessing report as John encounters. Many times John witnesses and writes one’s voice in first person, for example, vividly recording “I am” sayings of Jesus in first person.

The circular in-relationships (with verb “be” or “dwell”, or without a verb but understood in context) are abundantly found in 1 John with rich and insightful theological assertions and implications about Christians (as being born of God and in God). For example, one in Jesus or being born of God does not sin and cannot do sin (1 John 3:6-9; 5:18). Similar claims about sinlessness or impeccability (1 John 3:9; 5:18) are also noteworthy for everyone “born of God”. As the author of 1 John addressed to “my children” (1 John 2:1), the purpose of 1 John is distinctively pastoral and exhortative (1 John 2:1), to build and keep a strong and effective Christian identity and fellowship, and to guard against those who deceive (1 John 2:26) and who are antichrists (1 John 2:22).

Dodd (1946), followed by Malatesta (1978) and Brown (1982), notes about this “remain in” (or “abide in”) formula in 1 John 2:5, as characteristic of the Fourth Gospel, “not found (verbally) in the sources which are our authorities for Hellenistic mysticism”. Brown (1982) further elaborates this concept of divine indwelling as “important Johannine idea in the Old Testament and intertestamental Jewish writing” and “to keep the Johannine view of divine immanence distinctive”, noting that “this formula avoids that identification with divinity that marked many Hellenistic systems” by Hauck (Kittel 4:576). Moreover, the circularity of in-relationship should be recognized to enhance this line of argument for the Johannine characteristics and distinctiveness toward the authorship of John.

5.1 Everyone “Born of God” in 1 John 3:9

One of the difficult problems in 1 John is a paradox of (1) Christian as a sinner in need of confession of one’s own sin, thus to be forgiven by God (1 John 1:8-10) and (2) the impeccability of Christian who does not sin and is not even able to sin (1 John 3:9 and 5:18).

Stott (1964) followed by Brown (1982) presents various solutions, presenting seven different approaches for the harmony (of 1 John 1:8-10 versus 3:9) for (1) two different writers (of 1 John) in contradiction, (2) two different groups of adversaries with different polemics to be addressed, (3) two specific kinds of sin (for example, forgivable or unforgivable) in the author’s understanding, (4) two groups of Christians (for example, immature or mature) in the author’s understanding, (5) two modes of sinning with grammatical emphasis (for example, continual or habitual sin or not), (6) two different levels of Christian (real versus ideal), and (7) two literary contexts (for example, kerygmatic or apocalyptic). Further for “sin unto death” along with prayer of petition (for Christian brother’s sin) in 1 John 5:16, Brown (1982) groups various solutions into four classifications: (1) different types of petitions, (2) different types of penalties, (3) different types of sins, and (4) different types of people. As noted, these arguments or classifications are characterized by modal reasoning (with different aspects). There are five points to be noted.

First (1), concerning the passages of 1 John 1:8-10 and 5:16, the primary goal is for the repentance and forgiveness of sin of Christian with two modes of prayer: (1) by one’s own prayer of confession, and (2) by other Christian’s prayer of petition (intercession). In these two modes of prayer, both prayers are addressed by and to Christian (whether one’s faith is real or apparent), with one purpose in mind, for God’s forgiveness of one’s sin. Further non-Christian (yet to be saved) is excluded as the object-person of one’s intercessory prayer, that is, as intended for “brothers only” (1 John 5:16).

Second (2), concerning the passages of 1 John 1:8-10 and 2:1-2, one presumption (with the propitiation of Jesus Christ the righteous advocate for all the sins of the whole world) is that there is no sin unforgivable for those with confession in repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. This qualification (of the unlimited and unconditional divine pardon) should be the scope of the forgiveness with respect to sin, also applied to Christian’s prayer of petition for other Christian’s sin. The only sin excluded from both confession and petition of Christian is then the sin of making God a liar (1 John 1:10; 5:10), which is not to believe in God (as explained in 1 John 5:10), which is not believing in God’s witness about Jesus, (1) who is Christ and the son of God and who came in flesh (1 John 4:2, 9-10, 14-15; 5:10), (2) who died for our sins to save us for God so loved the world to be saved through his son (1 John 3:16; 4:7-10), (3) who is the righteous advocate before God (1 John 2:1-2), (4) for all Christians who believe in him and thus to obey his commandments (1 John 2:3), (5) to hold steadfast and victorious in faith, truth, and love until his second coming (1 John 2:28), (6) as the propitiation, not only for “our” sins but also for sins of the whole world (past, present, and future) (1 John 2:1-2), and (7) to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8). Thus those (claiming to be Christians but committing this “sin unto death” throughout one’s life unto death) are then termed in 1 John (1 John 2:18, 22, 26; 4:1, 3) as antichrists, liars, false prophets, and deceivers (of Christians and the world).

Third (3), this understanding about the sin (unto death) in 1 John is also consistent with the conviction of the Spirit

of the truth (John 16:7-11), first on the sin (John 16:9) which is not believing in Jesus Christ as the savior of the world (John 12:32-33; 1 John 4:14-15). The second conviction of the Holy Spirit is about the righteousness (John 16:10) with the faith in Jesus Christ in his ascension, thus about his physical absence here and now in this world, being seated at the right hand of the father as the righteous Son of God and Christ (Psalm 110:1; Matthew 22:41-46), and thereafter for the second coming of Jesus Christ (1 John 2:28) as the savior and the judge of the world. The third conviction of the Holy Spirit is about the judgment (John 16:11) that the prince of the world (Satan) has been judged (John 12:31, 1 John 3:8). This is also consistent with 1 John 2:2 for Jesus not only for the sins of Christians to be saved but also for the sins of the whole world as Jesus Christ is the judge of the world (Psalm 2:9) including the root cause of the evil of this world, that is, the prince of the world (Satan) and to destroy the works of Satan (1 John 3:8).

For Christian apologetics and defense of one’s faith, these three convictions in John 16:7-11 could be used very effectively and practically (with the messages in 1 John, side by side). For example, it is the conviction against the false faith (1 John 1:1-2) for one’s salvation, as one may ask why one has to believe in the son of God (Jesus Christ), that is, why not in God (the father) and “only” in God (without the son) for one’s salvation. It is the will of God, if one wants to obey God, to believe in the son of God (1 John 3:16; 4:2, 9-10, 14-15; 5:10). The second conviction is against the demand for the presence of Jesus Christ on this earth, here and now, if Jesus is truly real and alive. The third conviction is against a human rationale to postpone one’s conversion (even to the last minute of one’s death bed until death) as long as it takes one to believe. However, as the prince of the world (Satan) is already judged, the whole world (of the sinners) is now waiting for the imminent and final judgment of God in any moment (John 3:18). Furthermore this understanding of the sin (unto death) with the conviction of the Holy Spirit is then consistent with the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32). For example, both Judas (Matthew 26:14-16; John 13:21-31; John 18:5) and Peter (John 13:37; 18:16-27) betrayed Jesus. Judas regretted himself and committed suicide (Matthew 26; Acts 1:16-20) against the will of God to all sinners to repent and follow Jesus Christ whereas Peter betrayed even three times but repented to follow Jesus to become his entrusted disciple (John 21:15-17).

Fourth (4), 1 John 3:9 declares that everyone “born of God” does not sin for his seed dwells in him, and is not able to sin for he is “one born of God” (Πᾶς ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἁμαρτίαν οὐ ποιεῖ, ὅτι σπέρμα αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ μένει, καὶ οὐ δύναται ἁμαρτάνειν, ὅτι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γεγέννηται). Here the subject-person (1 John 3:9) is expressed as “one born of God” (ὁ γεγεννημένος ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ). This phrase “one born of God” is used again as the reason or the basis for “one born of God” not able to sin. This is clearly a circular (coinductive) reasoning as noted. That is, “one born of God” cannot sin for being “one born of God”. This line of reason is circular, to explain one personal characteristic of being sinless or impeccable as being “one born of God” (1 John 3:9) because of being “one born of God”. Based on this circularity, we have a basis to apply modal and nonmonotonic reasoning to examine the passages in 1 John 3:9 and 5:18 with respect to 1 John 1:8-10, as a case for paradox of circularity.

Indeed “sin” has very different meaning for a person (1) before being born of God and (2) after being born of God. For each sin committed before being born of God, its wage is death (Romans 6:23). After being born of God, sin carries no more a death-penalty. One being born of God is then subjective to and accountable for his or her own sin committed, with respect to Christian discipline, to be forgiven (1 John 1:1-10) and sinless (1 John 3:9; 5:18) through confession of the committed sin to be forgiven (1 John 1:8-10) or with petition (intercessory prayer) for other’s sin (1 John 5:16), not to sin again or continually (1 John 2:1), and for one’s sanctification and perfection in purity (1 John 3:3).

5.2 Other Noteworthy Circular Expressions in 1 John

There are a few noteworthy patterns of circularity (circular expression) in the Johannine Literature where the similar patterns are also noted in Section 2 with the selected examples. The first noteworthy circular expression is that of self-defining or self-explaining term where a term is defined, expressed, or explained by itself. One example is: “whoever does righteous (the righteousness) is righteous” (“ὁ ποιῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην δίκαιός ἐστιν”) in 1 John 3:7. This is also noted as “pleonastic relative clause modifying a noun to which its verb is cognate” (Hutchinson 2001) for John 5:32 and 17:26, or as “tautology” (Howard 1929). The second noteworthy circular expression is that of a phrase or a statement referring to the whole. For example, a phrase (for example, “this book”) in John 20:31 or Revelation 22:7 refers to the whole book which contains the phrase. Another example is for a phrase of a letter referring to the whole letter (for example, 1 John 5:13 or Romans 16:22). This pattern (that is, a member of a group points to the group itself) is also noted in Section 2 for the selected examples with Titus 1:12. Many times there is no (obvious) paradox or contradiction imposed to both speaker and readers (as these expressions are used in one’s daily live). The third noteworthy case is found in 1 John 4:12-16 where there are four occurrences of “abide” in-

relationship, worthy to be noted as Johannine “flower-bouquet” of circular “abide” in-relationships.

6. Critical Method toward the Analysis of Biblical Paradox of Circularity

In this paper, we have presented and explored the new paradigm of coinductive reasoning and its application to the selected literary circular-constructs found in the Bible. Many classical and difficult problems associated with these examples are clarified, analyzed, resolved, and explained in a sound framework of logic using coinductive, modal, and nonmonotonic reasoning. A simple diagramming (in lexical, syntactic, conceptual, or semantic level) is used to detect and analyze circular literary constructs with these selected passages. Further these circular-diagrams could be easily substituted with the corresponding computational models with some programming (Min and Gupta 2010). Many of the (apparent) confusions, conflicts, or contradictions inherently built in these passages are now clearly understood, clarified, and resolved in a sound framework of logic. Current approach and method to handle biblical paradox of circularity has been demonstrated to be very promising and fruitful in the study of the New Testament. In addition, there are a few more (unexpected and delightful) outcomes of this study, turned out to be pioneering and ground-breaking (for example, a parallel between Exodus 3:14-15 and John 8:12-20, and a unifying framework of metaphoric “I am” sayings in John).

6.1 What was the Real Problem Here?

After working through many difficult and challenging cases in this paper, we may pause now and look back in reflection to ask what we may have missed until now. We have known that many of these paradoxical problems are not easy but very difficult problems (as unsolved or even to be considered as unsolvable). After working with several problems in this paper, we now know enough about these problems and their common characteristics, and thus come to an understanding that these problems are very closely related and should be considered as a class of problem (of paradox of circularity) with respect to circular, modal, and nonmonotonic reasoning. Further, even though these problems are difficult, it is relatively easy and trivial to check and verify a solution if it is given up front (for example, by Jesus in Matthew 22:15-46).

In Matthew 22:15-46, we noted three paradoxical problems. The first problem (Matthew 22:15-22) is presented to Jesus by the Pharisees and the Herodians about paying tax to Caesar, to set a trap in word. The second problem (Matthew 22:23-33) is presented to Jesus by the Sadducees about resurrection and marriage, again to set a trap in word. And the third problem (Matthew 22:41-46) is presented by Jesus to the Pharisees, on the Messiah addressed by David as his lord in Psalm 110, to shut their mouths. We note several interesting points as follow.

First (1), it is reasonable to assume that each problem is unsolved and (more likely) unsolvable to the contemporary Jews (notably by the Pharisees, the Herodians, and the Sadducees) at the time of Jesus. Second (2), each problem is very difficult but its solution (provided by Jesus) is almost trivial, intuitive, and easy to be verified by anyone including the Jews at that time. Third (3), there is no way to know how Jesus solves these problems but there is a clear indication that Jesus knows the solutions as well as how to solve these problems. Fourth (4), we (the contemporary biblical scholarship in the past, including the Jews at the time of Jesus) have treated each problem (with its solution if given) case by case (as if these problems are unrelated and independent of each other). Fifth (5), it seems that we had no clear understanding or explanation on how these problems are solved (for example, by Jesus) or even constructed. And there are many more problems (paradoxes), claimed to be unsolved or unsolvable in today’s biblical scholarship.

Let’s take another look at a paradox, for example, in Matthew 22:23-33 on the problem of resurrection (with marriage). As discussed, there is a vicious circle (in state of being alive, dead, and to be alive again after resurrection) which meant to be linear (from being alive to be dead). It is mixed with the competing legal demand of each brother (as a legitimate husband) after resurrection in this marriage relationship, without any compromise for the exclusive legal right of each husband upon the woman, and meant to be exclusive.

This controversial problem is presented to Jesus by the Sadducees who do not believe in resurrection. There is no doubt that the Pharisees at the time of Jesus heard the same question many times by the Sadducees, spending many sleepless nights in their prayer for an answer. Thus one may wonder how the Pharisees would respond to the question if they are challenged with the same question. The Pharisees would say that they have no idea (or do not know all the details) but they believe in God almighty who will take care of all these things. The Pharisees may add one more comment saying that the Sadducees should cast away their doubt but simply trust God. In reply, the Sadducees will accuse the Pharisees with their stubbornness and blind faith, saying that how one could believe what

is not true (contradictory).

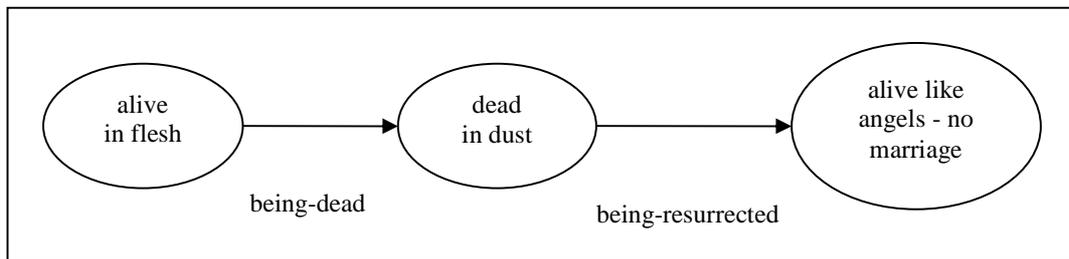


Figure 6.1 Life-Status (alive, dead, and resurrected) in Matthew 22:23-33

It seems that today's Christians are also repeating the same old *vicious circle* where one side is presided by the Pharisees and the other side is presided by the Sadducees, with some of the very difficult theological problems of paradox. However, once we understand the inherent nature of some of these problems, that is, paradox of circularity, we then have a good handle to work toward the viable solutions, hopefully satisfactory to both sides. And it took almost 2000 years to reconstruct some of the early Christian understanding of paradox and finally to be able to solve some of these difficult and controversial problems in the biblical scholarship since Jesus and the apostles.

6.2 A New Approach to Paradox of Circularity

In this paper, we have developed and presented a few ways to detect or identify circularity (as a potential root cause) of a problem of paradox. We summarize here three ways to detect the problem (in paradox of circularity).

First (1), it is to detect a (real or apparent) contradiction or paradox presented in the text to trigger a possibility or an opportunity for circular, modal, and nonmonotonic reasoning. Many of these problems are well-known and traditionally classified as very difficult (or even as unsolvable) problems in the biblical scholarship in the past. One example for this approach is the well-known and aged problem of sinned-state versus sinless-state of Christian presented in 1 John, to detect and apply the circularity in 1 John 3:9, thus to be resolved with modal and nonmonotonic reasoning. Another noteworthy example is the conflicting statements by Jesus in John 5:31 versus John 8:16 for the validity (truth) of his own testimony. With the multi-modal layers, one can resolve easily the contradiction imposed in these passages.

Second (2), it is to detect a literary circular construct, clearly presented in the passage or through a simple literary analysis or diagramming (for example, with lexical, syntactic, conceptual, structural, or semantic analysis), to detect a circularity. From this initial investigation, one may detect or relate a problem which could be caused by or rooted in this circularity with modal and nonmonotonic reasoning. One example for this approach is the circular in-relationship of the father and the son in John 14:10 or the paradoxical examples in Matthew 22:15-46.

Third (3), it is the biblical passage presenting two distinctive proofs (with one including coinductive reasoning). One example is the "I am" saying in John 8:12-20 with two proof methods. As closely investigated, the passage presents two distinctive proof methods (which have been undermined or overlooked by the majority of biblical scholarship in the past). Further this discovery (of coinductive proof method by Jesus) then opens up a new insight, an innovative breakthrough, and a novel (hermeneutical) solution to "I am" sayings in John. This provides a fresh and new ground to understand and unify all metaphorical "I am" sayings of Jesus in John. In addition, it is noted that there is a close parallel between Exodus 3:14-15 (by God) and John 8:12-20 (by Jesus) with respect to two distinctive proof-methods.

As noted (for example, with Matthew 22:23-33), a (model) set of two conflicting solutions (models or interpretation) could be valid. Thus to have two conflicting answers (models) is not necessarily a contradiction but a possibility of valid modal solutions. Furthermore, circular reasoning can be used in wrong or invalid manner. For example, if one's assumption in an argument is invalid, then one's whole argument is invalid whether deduction, induction, or coinduction is used. For example, the case of a stranger demanding to trust him "simply because he says so" is circular reasoning but not to be taken seriously by any mature and responsible person. Next we will take a brief description of two methods in logic (induction and coinduction) as we have used somewhat informally in this paper.

6.3 Two *a priori* Methods of Logic: Induction and Coinduction

Coinduction (coinductive reasoning) is discussed and contrasted in this paper with the selected examples as a critical method in biblical exegesis and hermeneutics, in contrast to induction (inductive reasoning). As we surveyed and discussed, these two distinctive ways of reasoning are found abundantly not only in the bible but also in our daily lives. Along with deduction, induction and coinduction are *a priori* methods in logic. Let’s take another look at induction and coinduction (Goldin and Keil 2001).

Induction is a familiar term along with inductive reasoning, inductive logic, or even inductive bible study using the logic of induction. Induction corresponds to well-founded structures from which a basis serves as the foundation for building more complex structures. An object constructed in inductive definition is called a “well-founded” object for there is a well-founded base, and a set of such objects is called a well-founded set. Hence the set of natural numbers constructed by induction (to start with zero and by adding one, repeatedly and finitely many times) is a well-founded set. And it does not include any infinite number (because the infinitely many iterations of adding one onto zero will never be terminated in finite steps). Thus minimality implies that any infinite numbers are not members of the inductively defined set of lists of numbers. Inductive definitions correspond to “least fixed point interpretation” of so-called “recursive” definitions. In summary, inductive definitions have three components: initiality, iteration, and minimality.

In contrast, coinduction eliminates the initiality condition and it replaces the minimality condition with maximality. No requirement for initiality means that there is no need for a base-case in coinductive definitions. Coinductive definitions have two components: iteration and maximality. Any object constructed in coinductive definition is called a “not-well-founded” object because there is no base. Further iteration of coinductive definition (without a base) is achieved by circular construct (as an infinite loop, being applied infinitely many times). Thus, while these examples and definition may appear to be circular (or meaningless, as it seems to be), the definition is well formed since coinduction corresponds to “greatest fixed point interpretation” of recursive definitions. The resulting formal system of reasoning (logic) is termed as “coinduction” (in coinductive reasoning or logic), in contrast to the traditional “induction” (in inductive reasoning or logic).

One descriptive example of inductive reasoning in the Bible is found in the genealogy of Jesus Christ presented in Luke 3:23-38, generation by generation. Here is the first man (Adam) who was created by God (initiality), with “begot” relationship generation after generation (iteration), and finally down to Jesus Christ in a “finite” lineage (in finite steps of “begot”), no more and no less (minimality) as anyone in the genealogy can be traced from God step by step in finite steps. Similarly one descriptive example of coinductive reasoning in the bible is found in Hebrews 7:1-3 about Melchizedek who is described as (1) without father or mother, without genealogy, without beginning of days (that is, no initiality), (2) without end of life (maximality) and (3) being a priest (that is, iteration, of priestly ministry year by year) forever.

One misleading view on minimality in induction is a tendency for “one and only one” (best) model or valid interpretation (if one exists). The reflection of this misconception in biblical scholarship is the pervasive and persistent tendency toward “one and only one” (best) interpretation in the contemporary biblical exegesis and interpretation. Allowing the *possible world* semantics, it is possible to justify an array of many valid interpretations in exegesis where some valid interpretations could be in conflict with (contradicting to) some other valid interpretations. A classical example in the contemporary New Testament scholarship with pioneering and successful application of modal logic is found in the works of Cullmann (1946; 1965). It is the two-stage coming of the Kingdom of God, expressed in temporal-modal logic of “already” and “not yet” in tension (Luke 17:20-30), in the framework of the salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*). It took over a half-century to uncover the underlying critical method in temporal-modal logic, and to be correctly recognized and rightfully appreciated.

For a note, the scholarly tradition of inductive reasoning and its opposition against modal reasoning could be traced back to Kant (1781), and the omission of modality by Frege (1879) in his pioneering groundwork of modern logic for propositional and higher-order logic. The reader is referred to Kripke (1975) and Barwise and Moss (1996) for an excellent introduction to coinduction, and Fitting and Mendelsohn (1998) for an excellent introduction to modal logic (including the brief introduction to Aristotle’s work in modal logic).

6.4 Biblical Exegesis and Interpretation with Coinductive, Modal, and Nonmonotonic Reasoning

One may wonder what difference it would make with or without coinductive (circular) reasoning in biblical exegesis

and interpretation. First (1), it is to acknowledge and understand the subtle difference between two methods in logic (induction and coinduction), and thus in one's exegesis. Second (2), each method (induction or coinduction) implies its own semantics (meaning), and thus in one's exegesis. In inductive reasoning, circularity has no meaning (nonsense) but treated as a purely literary metaphor which has no sense (that is, nonsense), to be neglected, ignored, or deconstructed by the reader to give a new meaning to it. Third (3), coinductive, modal, and nonmonotonic reasoning provides a new perspective and paradigm to biblical exegesis. In this paper, it has been demonstrated to be effective and novel in solving many difficult problems with the selected passages, and further to provide a unifying solution (possible world semantics) to the conflicting or contradicting opinions when presented with the traditional method of biblical exegesis. Fourth (4), it is distinctively computational. Further the diagramming method to detect literary circularity (which is simple and intuitive to those with some lexical or syntactic diagramming) can be carried without any additional training or learning.

7. Conclusion

The approach and methodology presented in this paper is distinctively computational. The scope of this paper is restricted to the selected examples of biblical paradoxes of circularity in the Bible and "I am" sayings in John, and extended to the Johannine literature. Current working definition of the term "paradox" is "contrary to (common, expected, or accepted) opinion". As noted, this definition is both satisfactory and flexible enough for the purpose and scope of current study.

In this paper, the new perspective and paradigm of coinductive reasoning and its application to the biblical texts are presented and analyzed. First, a brief survey of the exemplary and landmark examples of biblical paradoxes of circularity is presented and analyzed for their structures and inherent circular, paradoxical, modal, or nonmonotonic characteristics. Some of the examples of biblical paradoxes include: the meaning of the name of God in Exodus 3:14, the Father-Son in-relationship in John 14:10, the Liar's Paradox in Titus 1:12, and the paradoxes in Matthew 22:15-46. These landmark examples provide a fair sample and collection of biblical paradoxes to start and form a categorical framework. Various circular relationships are observed at lexical, syntactic, or semantic level, adding further a layer of complexity with negation.

A literary structure of a paradoxical cycle can be constructed with one concept in self-referencing ("I am who I am" in Exodus 3:14), two concepts in mutual-referencing ("I am in the father and the father is in me" in John 14:10), many concepts in a cycle with a directed relationship (lord-servant relationship, from David to his descendants including Christ, back to David in Matthew 22:41-46), and one concept as an element, referring to a set or a group of which the concept is a member ("all Cretans are always liars" by a Cretan prophet, in Titus 1:12). Some distinctive and inherent characteristics of biblical paradoxes are: circular, modal, or nonmonotonic. The current lists are far from being complete, and waiting to be explored, studied and expanded in future study.

Two proof methods in John 8:12-20 are examined and compared. This is a noteworthy example which provides a clear evidence of both inductive reasoning based on the Law and coinductive reasoning based on the (divine) self-testimony, as the proof methods in the Bible. The discovery and presence of coinductive reasoning in John 8:12-20 creates a concrete basis for the critical method of reasoning, further to extend and explore the biblical system of reasoning, its complexity and dynamics, and its related theological concepts and motifs in John. One of the unifying concepts of the Bible, as noted in current study of biblical paradox of circularity, is the concept of secure message and communication in the biblical system, closely related to revelation, prophecy, sign, and other communication devices such as parable and dream-vision.

This observation provides a critical key and new interpretive paradigm to "I am" sayings by Jesus, for self-identification or self-predication, as being used with or without predicate. Furthermore it is noted that "I am" sayings by Jesus in John 10:1-39 are used to identify the true identity of the gate and the good shepherd in the metaphoric story (figure of speech) of John 10:1-5. With this understanding, it is noted that each metaphorical "I am" saying by Jesus in John functions as (self-identifying) interpretive key to the true identity of the central symbolic figure as each story being unfolded.

Various "I am" sayings are analyzed for their circular constructs and relationships. One classical example in John is the identity of Jesus being in Father (John 14:10) who is in Jesus, presenting a paradox of circular in-relationship. Further "I am" sayings in John are examined in the light of circular in-relationship along with one-relationship of the Father and Jesus (the Son). The pair-relationship (of in-relationship and one-relationship) is also expressed with the

disciples, and in-relationship with Holy Spirit. Moreover these metaphorical “I am” sayings in John are used as interpretive key, to understand some of the very difficult sayings of Jesus (for example, “eat my flesh” and “drink my blood” in John 6). A few different types of circular relationships are noted with “the word” or “truth” with the disciple(s), and “love” which is complete (as all the relational links between Jesus, the Father, and the disciples are expressed).

Further we extended current study to the Johannine writings for biblical paradox of circularity (primarily in 1 John) and “I am” sayings (primarily in the Revelation). The apparent contradiction with the sinless-state (the impeccability) of Christian in 1 John 3:9 and 5:18 with the sinned-state of Christian in need of confession and forgiveness of God in 1 John 1:8-10 present a serious rhetorical and theological problem to be harmonized. Understanding the pattern of circularity in 1 John 3:9 provides a key to resolve this problem as paradox of circularity to consider modal and nonmonotonic reasoning for a solution.

Finally the current approach and methods used in this paper are summarized and presented as a new critical method in the study of the New Testament. The approach of this paper is distinctively computational with coinductive, modal, and nonmonotonic reasoning. Current study provides a promising new prospective and paradigm, and many groundbreaking results for many of the classical problems of biblical paradox. This is the author’s hope to bring a renewed interest, understanding, and excitement toward the study of biblical paradox in the dawn of the 21st century.

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Waltke, Bruce K. B000AP9ID0 Bruce K. Waltke (Author)

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