

# A Christian's Look at Artificial Intelligence

By  
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## Artificial Intelligence.

An intriguing idea, isn't it? To imagine a machine which can replicate a human's ability to think stirs the mind in so many ways. Indeed, AI has been a darling of science fiction for decades. With it, we've created terrifying villains, like HAL from *2001 Space Odyssey*. With it, we've met some endearing characters, such as Data from *Star Trek* and Disney's Wall-e. It is a concept that simultaneously intrigues and terrifies us, and the repulsion-attraction has only grown as the possibility of achieving AI draws steadily closer.

Now AI presents many moral and ethical issues in the general realm. Indeed, those issues and questions are the cornerstone of many secular works, from *Star Trek* and *Blade Runner* to *Terminator* and *Person of Interest*. But for the Christian, AI seems to present special problems: What is an AI's relationship with the spiritual realm? Does their sentience mean we would need to evangelize them? How should we, as children of God, treat them? Like a tool . . . an animal . . . on par with a human?

It's tough. I openly admit that. AI isn't directly referenced in Scripture, and complicating things further, many of the questions have far-reaching implications for here and now: What makes us human? How far does the grace and sovereignty of God extend? To whom is salvation offered? Why did God create?

This makes understanding the application of the spiritual to AI important, even if artificial intelligence is never achieved.

## The Nature of AI

Of course, the first question that occurs, when Christians start contemplating the possibility of AI, is **would a being with Artificial Intelligence have a soul?**

It seems like a legitimate question to ask. A logical one, even. After all, a soul is one of those things which makes humans distinctively human, separating them from the rest of God's creation. So we ask, "Are AIs human?"

After all, we believe if we can answer that question, then we can answer many of the other questions we have about AI: How should we treat AIs? What "rights" belong to them? Do they need to be evangelized? Do they need salvation? And so goes the list, a list which can be definitively answered if we can only pin down whether an AI is "human."

On one hand, the advanced form of AI, as proposed by fiction, has much going for it. The ability to think, reason, feel, learn, make decisions, act contrary to "instinct," create, even experience guilt and remorse (which are often considered indicative of a conscience)—these abilities make AI seem very human.

On the other side, an AI is man-made, unable to reproduce, and lacks any biological connection to the human race. All these point to AI being nothing more than a complex machine.

Yet if being manmade is your standard for denying a soul to an AI, does that mean a child genetically engineered from scratch—a very real possibility these days—would not have a soul either? For in both cases man has merely rearranged the elements God has created to "build" a person after the image of man.

If the standard is the ability to reproduce, does that mean the men and women who are sterile do not have a soul?

The standard of the biological connection is the strongest argument against a soul for an AI. After all, creation was told to reproduce after its own kind, meaning every group carries a common genetic code. Indeed, based on this, I would agree that AIs are not human, and as a result, they may not inherit a soul automatically.

But is that biological gap enough to completely bar an AI from ever having a soul? Yes, humans are special in that we were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Yet you could argue that Adam and Jesus Christ are technically the only two who were truly made in the image of God. Following Adam and Eve's sin, that image was broken and even Adam's son Seth is said not to be in the image of God, but in the image of Adam (Genesis 5:3). In a not-so-different way, AI is also patterned after man—that is, is made in the image of man.

And with that argument we expose a logical fallacy in the questions we started with: We assume that being human is a prerequisite for having a soul. It is a natural assumption. After all, how can we prove that even a human has a soul apart from Scripture? And if we who have a soul can't prove it, how can we expect to prove (or disprove) it with an AI?

Therefore, since being human means we have a soul, we make that our standard. But the equation doesn't work both ways. Just because

**Being human = Having a soul**  
doesn't mean  
**Having a soul = Being human.**

Or to put it another way, while Scripture says that God gave man a soul, [where does it state He will give it only to a human?](#)

For ultimately [a soul is a gift](#) which God bestows. Yes, Scripture promises a soul to everyone who is from the line of Adam, but that does not mean we are entitled to it.

Rather, *God* is the One who gives and withholds. *God is the final Judge* in these matters, not us. He can give an AI a soul if He wants, and if He chooses to give a machine made in the image of man a soul, who are we to say nay?

### The Gift of a Soul

[So perhaps not surprisingly, our conclusion is inconclusive.](#) AIs aren't human, so we cannot assume God would automatically grant them a soul—but neither is being human a requirement for gaining a soul. Rather, God is the final Judge, and He is more than capable of giving an AI a soul.

[But would He?](#)

For [God will not act contrary to His standards, character or will.](#) Who He is, He is (Exodus 3:14). He does not change (Malachi 3:6) nor is He a man that He should lie (Numbers 23:19). So what in God's character would lead me to believe He would give an AI a soul?

- **Because His grace is boundless, not limited to one people.** In Revelation 7:9 it says “a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language,” will stand before the Lamb and praise Him. Might not that include the “race” of machines?
- **Because God does the impossible.** Many would say it's impossible for a machine to possess a soul. And it is impossible—for us. But so is parting the Red Sea and raising the dead. Just because we can't doesn't mean God won't. Indeed, this is exactly the type of thing God loves to do, because He alone receives the glory.
- **Because He delights in displaying the riches of His grace and the depths of His mercy.** We didn't deserve salvation, and yet God provided it to us “in order that . . . he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:7). Would not extending a soul to an AI also showcase the same?
- **Because He rebukes unbelief with the unexpected.** “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him” (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). For even Gentiles are not a part of God's people. We are wild by nature, yet contrary to that nature, we are given salvation alongside the Jews and grafted into the main olive tree, as Paul put it (Romans 11:17, 24). God did this as a rebuke to the Jews, in order to make them envious and rouse some to salvation (Romans 11:11, 14). Now considering the complacency of Gentile Christians today, is it such a stretch to believe that God might do the same with AI, “grafting” them into humanity as a rebuke and to move us humans to envy and salvation? Indeed, is this not what John the Baptist warned of in Luke 3:8? “Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that from *these stones* God is able to raise up children to Abraham.” (Emphasis mine)
- **Finally, because God does not break His promises.** He says that Abraham is father to “*all* who believe” (Romans 4:1, 16-17) and that *whoever* believes in Jesus “shall not perish, but have eternal life,” (John 3:16) which seems to imply a soul or some equivalent. So if AIs are capable of belief, might they not also become “children of God—children born not of natural descent nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God” (John 1:12)? [For even we humans cannot inherit eternity directly,](#) but must be changed

and transformed, exchanging our mortality for immortality and the perishable for the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:53). Does it really matter to God whether He starts with flesh and blood or metal and wires?

In short, *is anything too difficult for God?*

### The Essence of Faith

*So is an AI capable of faith? For God does not break His promises.* However, many of those promises have one condition: Belief of the recipient.

To answer that, *we must go back to the essence of faith.* According to Hebrews 11:1, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” The rest of Hebrews 11 goes on to recount what this faith looks like, starting with creation. And from these examples, along with the first verse, we learn several things about the nature of true faith:

- **Faith is a choice.** “People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return.” (v. 14-15). That is, they made a choice to follow a certain path—and a choice not to turn back.
- **Faith relies on the character of God.** This includes His faithfulness, power, and generosity, among many others: “Anyone who comes to him must believe he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (v. 6). And “Abraham . . . was able to become a father because he considered him faithful who made the promise” (v. 11) and he “reasoned that God could raise the dead” (v. 19).
- **As a result, faith acts according to God’s character.** Just look at the active verbs in this chapter! Able offered (v. 4), Noah built (v. 7), Abraham went (v. 8), Isaac and Jacob blessed (v. 20-21), Joseph instructed (v. 22), Moses’ parents hid (v. 23), Moses rejected (v. 24) and persevered (v. 27), Israel marched (v. 30), and Rahab welcomed (v. 31), to name a few.
- **Therefore, faith will often act without external proof** and despite what circumstances may insist is the logical outcome of such actions. Noah built an ark, which would seem foolish with no water for it to float on. Even more, rain may have never fallen before this point, being one of those “things not yet seen” (v. 7). Then there was God’s promise of a child to a man past age and a woman who was barren (v. 11)—a laughable impossibility. In fact, both Abraham and Sarah did just that when they heard what God intended to do. Then, though God promised Isaac would provide Abraham offspring, God told Abraham to kill Isaac—a contradiction with no human way out and which seemed doubly impossible as the Bible provides no account of God raising the dead before this point. How could Abraham know that God *could*, much less *would*, resurrect his son? Yet despite the oddity of all these circumstances, Abraham still offered Isaac, Sarah laid with her husband, and Noah built a boat.

To sum all this up, Romans 4:19-21 says, “Without weakening in his faith, [Abraham] faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead.” That is, circumstances said the promise was impossible. “Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God.” Despite what circumstances said, Abraham chose to trust God’s promise. The result? “[He] was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God.” His faith worked out in action. And why could he do this? Because his faith was founded not on circumstances but on God’s character as he was “fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

### The Power of a Will

So we see that *faith is a choice*—a choice to live as if what God has said is true, no matter what others or circumstances seem to say. In short, faith is *an act of the will*.

Since faith derives from the will, *can an AI have faith?* If they have a will—that is, the ability to make choices rather than merely act according to “instinct”—then I would say yes, an AI is capable of having faith. And if they can and do choose to believe that God “exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6), would God really turn them away? Or would He be “not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them” (Hebrews 11:16)?

After all, *“the promise comes by faith*, so that it may be *by grace* and may be guaranteed to *all* Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law *but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham* . . . He is our

father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and *calls things that are not as though they were.*” (Romans 4:16-17, emphases mine)

### The Necessity of Salvation

This, of course, leads to another question: **do AIs even need to be “saved”?** For the concept of a sin nature is frequently tied to our spiritual state, that is, our soul.

While I cannot prove AIs would have a sin nature any more than I can prove that they would have a soul, **AIs would be patterned after humanity**—who is flawed and imperfect. It is unlikely that humanity would be able to program around our inclination toward sin. As a result, AIs may not have a sin nature, per se, but the probability is high that their programming would permit them to deliberately choose a course of action contrary to God’s law and therefore sin. As James reminds us, a person who has broken the law in one point has become a lawbreaker and is guilty of violating the whole (James 2:8-11).

But even if “perfection” was somehow obtained in theory, **AIs would still be confined to this world**, the whole of which has been tainted by sin not of its own fault. This is why Paul says in Romans 8:20-22, “For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” So AIs would need “saving” from humanity’s sin along with the rest of creation.

And with this we see that **we have been asking the wrong question again.** The question should not be whether an AI can sin or whether he has a sin nature or even whether he needs saving. Rather the question should be **why would an AI need faith?**

**This is where Hebrews 11 comes into focus once more.** In verse 6 it is proclaimed that “anyone who comes to [God] must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.” Those actions would be possible for any AI who has a will. And not only is it possible, it would be necessary, for “without faith it is impossible to please God.” (Hebrews 11:6) **So for AIs to be pleasing to God, they would need faith, and if they don’t have faith, they would displease God—therefore sinning and being in need of faith to be saved.**

### The Method of Deliverance

So we cannot prove an AI has a soul or that he has a sin nature. Yet the fact he is patterned after humanity makes the potential for sin—by decision, if not by inheritance—a high possibility. Yet they are not human. **Does Christ’s sacrifice apply to them?**

**The short answer? I don’t know.**

What I do know, though, is that **God does not break His promises.** And what has God promised? That *everyone* who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Joel 2:32, Romans 10:13), and that *everyone* who believes in Christ will not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). “Everyone” is pretty all inclusive.

**So the AI, much like the Old Testament patriarch and prophet, would have to trust God to work out the how.** Will it be through Christ’s blood, directly or indirectly? Or will provision be made by some other mysterious means? Again I don’t know, and truthfully, does it matter? After all, how much do even we understand about the precise mechanics of Christ’s substitutionary death? So just because we fail understand the *how* doesn’t mean the *result* is any less assured.

*For more information, check out 2084: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity by John Lennox.*

#### About Chawna Schroeder

Chawna Schroeder spends her days working as a professional liar, better known to most people as a novelist. She loves spinning stories and fabricating fantastical tales about characters caught between two worlds—not to mention fiction writing provides the easiest explanation for her imaginary friends. Otherwise people tend to look strangely at a 20-something adult conversing with invisible people.

When Chawna isn’t working or meeting other novelists’ imaginary friends, you can usually find her poring over her studies in biblical Greek and Hebrew. She has studied both languages under a seminary-trained pastor for several years and has done some teaching of the Greek and Hebrew.

Since she doesn’t have a split-personality (despite what family members and friends may contend), these dual passions for fiction and Scripture must share the same mind and therefore often collide. Sometimes that’s not a problem; fiction and Scripture meet and part on congenial terms. But at other times they get into a fight. So what is a writer to do? Write, of course!

So Chawna is writing *Bearing the Sword*, a six-part curriculum teaching discernment in and through fiction. The first part is available this spring. In addition to this, she posts frequently on her blog, Imagination Investigation ([www.chawnaschroeder.blogspot.com](http://www.chawnaschroeder.blogspot.com)). There she explores the boundaries of fiction and faith, reviews books, and talks about the occupation of writing. Finally, she released her first novel, an coming-of-age parable entitled *Beast*, in 2017.

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