
The Mind of Christ and the Machine of Words

Joe Guerra, Jr.

1 Corinthians 2:6–16 and the Difference between Artificial Eloquence and Spiritual Discernment

Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence can now produce prayers, sermons, Bible studies, and theological explanations that sound recognizably Christian. This capacity raises a narrow biblical-theological question: Can a machine that generates true Christian sentences be said to “speak by the Spirit”? This article answers that question through an exegetical and canonical study of 1 Corinthians 2:6–16. Paul distinguishes the wisdom of the present age from God’s hidden wisdom, revealed through the Spirit, received by those who have the Spirit, and communicated in Spirit-taught words. His argument reaches its climax in the claim that believers “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), a statement shaped by Paul’s citation of Isaiah 40:13 and by the wider biblical pattern of Spirit-given wisdom, covenant renewal, prophetic speech, and participation in Christ. The article argues that artificial intelligence may serve instrumentally in producing grammatically and even doctrinally correct language, just as other human tools may preserve and transmit truthful words. Nevertheless, Pauline spiritual speech cannot be reduced to semantic accuracy, verbal fluency, or information retrieval. It arises from a living relation to the triune God: revelation by the Spirit, reception through faith, transformation into Christ’s pattern, and accountable service within Christ’s body. The difference is not that every human utterance is spiritual and every machine-assisted utterance false. The difference is that a machine can arrange signs

without standing in the covenantal reality those signs announce. This distinction protects the usefulness of technology while resisting the church's temptation to confuse verbal performance with wisdom from God.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, Holy Spirit, mind of Christ, spiritual discernment, 1 Corinthians 2, biblical theology, theological anthropology

THE QUESTION BEHIND THE FLUENT ANSWER

A machine can now write a prayer in seconds. It can assemble a sermon outline, summarize a commentary, compare translations, imitate the vocabulary of a confession, and produce a compassionate answer to a grieving person. The sentences may be elegant. They may be doctrinally sound. They may even help someone. The unsettling question is not whether the words can be useful. They plainly can. The question is what kind of speech they are.

The church has always known that true words and truthful speakers are not identical. Balaam spoke a word God used while his heart remained crooked (Num 22–24; 2 Pet 2:15–16). Caiaphas prophesied more than he understood (John 11:49–52). Demons correctly identified Jesus as the Holy One of God, yet their recognition was neither faith nor worship (Mark 1:24; Jas 2:19). Paul could therefore warn that impressive speech may lack the cross-shaped power of God (1 Cor 1:17; 2:1–5; 13:1–3). Scripture refuses to judge speech by verbal surface alone.

Generative artificial intelligence intensifies this old problem because it separates linguistic performance from lived understanding in a new and powerful way. A large language model produces sequences of words by learning statistical patterns from immense collections of human language. Its output can exhibit coherence, analogy, apparent judgment, and stylistic sensitivity. Whether present or future systems possess

consciousness is disputed and need not be resolved here.¹ The narrower theological fact is enough: a system can produce Christian language without baptism, prayer, repentance, suffering, hope, membership in the church, or conscious confession of Jesus as Lord.

This creates a precise research question: According to 1 Corinthians 2:6–16, can the production of biblically true and rhetorically persuasive language qualify as speech “taught by the Spirit,” or does Pauline spiritual speech require participation in a covenantal and Christological reality that a computational artifact does not possess?

This article argues that Paul’s account excludes the reduction of spiritual speech to verbal competence. In 1 Corinthians 2:6–16, wisdom originates in God’s eternal purpose, is revealed by the searching Spirit, is received by Spirit-given discernment, and is communicated within a people who possess “the mind of Christ.” Spiritual speech is therefore not merely correct information about God. It is creaturely, covenantal participation in God’s self-communication through Christ and by the Spirit. An AI system may transmit, rearrange, and help humans study truthful theological language. It may function as an instrument within human acts of teaching. But it does not thereby become a spiritual knower, witness, teacher, or member of Christ.

The argument follows the text before widening canonically. First, the historical and rhetorical problem in Corinth is considered. Second, 1 Corinthians 2:6–16 is examined as a movement from divine wisdom to spiritual reception and speech. Third, Paul’s use of Isaiah 40:13 is traced within the biblical theology of God’s incomparable mind and the gift of the Spirit. Fourth, the article distinguishes linguistic output from

¹ For contrasting philosophical approaches to artificial intelligence and moral status, see Mark Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020), 67–86; and Noreen L. Herzfeld, *In Our Image: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Spirit* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 25–52.

spiritual discernment. Fifth, it proposes a constructive account of AI as instrument rather than pneumatic subject. Finally, it considers implications for preaching, theological education, pastoral care, and Christian witness.

WISDOM IN CORINTH: THE CROSS BEFORE THE MACHINE

A Community Captivated by Visible Excellence

First Corinthians does not begin with a neutral philosophy of knowledge. It begins with a divided church. Some believers identify themselves with Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or Christ (1 Cor 1:10–12). Their party spirit reveals a desire to secure identity through impressive leaders. Paul answers by directing attention to the crucified Messiah, whose cross overturns ordinary measures of strength and wisdom (1:18–25).²

The Corinthian problem was not simply that the congregation valued intelligence. Paul himself speaks wisdom among the mature (2:6), reasons carefully, quotes Scripture, and expects believers to judge what he says (10:15; 14:29). The problem was a kind of wisdom ordered toward status. Eloquence could become a ladder by which speaker and audience climbed above others. The cross destroys that ladder because the Lord of glory is known in a form the rulers of the age did not recognize (2:8).³

Paul therefore contrasts the “wisdom of this age” with “God’s wisdom in a mystery” (2:6–7). The Greek *mysterion* does not mean an irrational puzzle available only to an elite. In Paul, it commonly refers to God’s once-hidden purpose now disclosed

² Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1997), 22–31; Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 75–98.

³ Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 229–38.

in the gospel (Rom 16:25–26; Eph 1:9–10; 3:3–6; Col 1:26–27).⁴ Divine wisdom is hidden not because God delights in obscurity, but because fallen powers do not discover it by climbing upward. God reveals it in the crucified Christ.

This setting matters for AI. The first theological temptation is to begin with the machine's impressive output and ask how close it has come to human or spiritual intelligence. Paul begins elsewhere. He asks whether wisdom conforms to the crucified Lord. A fluent answer may still belong to the logic of the age if it serves self-display, domination, rivalry, or escape from creaturely dependence. The decisive test is not amazement but the cross.

Paul's Refusal of Mere Eloquence

Paul reminds the Corinthians that he did not come with “lofty speech or wisdom” but resolved to know Jesus Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:1–2). This does not mean that Paul intentionally spoke badly. His letters display argument, rhetoric, scriptural interpretation, and pastoral skill. He refuses, rather, to allow the gospel's credibility to rest upon techniques that draw faith toward the speaker's performance.⁵

His “speech and message” were not in persuasive words of wisdom but in demonstration of Spirit and power, “so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (2:4–5). Paul is concerned with the ground of faith. If hearers trust because they are captivated by verbal polish, their confidence rests upon an unstable object. Christian faith must rest upon God acting through the gospel.

This distinction is directly relevant to generated language. AI can lower the cost of verbal polish. It can make mediocre

⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 353–58.

⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 106–15.

thoughts appear organized and emotionally resonant. That is not inherently sinful; editors, dictionaries, and teachers also improve expression. Yet the church should fear an economy in which the appearance of wisdom becomes easier to manufacture than the slow formation of a wise person. Paul's concern is not that words are unimportant. It is that verbal performance can conceal the absence of cruciform truth and spiritual power.⁶

FROM GOD'S DEPTHS TO SPIRIT-TAUGHT WORDS

Wisdom Ordained before the Ages

Paul's positive account begins with God's action. The wisdom he speaks was "decreed before the ages for our glory" (1 Cor 2:7). Salvation is not an improvised repair. The cross, incomprehensible to the rulers of the age, belongs to God's eternal purpose. The phrase "for our glory" locates Christian knowing inside redemption: God's wisdom does not merely inform believers; it brings them toward their appointed end in Christ (Rom 8:29–30; 1 Cor 15:42–49).⁷

Paul supports this claim with language drawn from Isaiah 64:4: "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). The point is not that revelation remains inaccessible. Verse 10 immediately declares, "these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit." What human perception could not discover, divine revelation has made known.⁸

The order is decisive. Spiritual wisdom does not arise from the agent's ability to infer God from sufficient data. It begins in God's purpose and gift. Human eyes, ears, and hearts do not scale upward until they capture the divine mystery. God

⁶ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 35–40; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 208–18.

⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 124–31.

⁸ Fee, *First Epistle*, 117–21.

communicates downward. Revelation is not the reward of superior pattern recognition.

An AI system reverses none of this order. It may detect patterns across biblical and theological texts at a scale no individual scholar can match. That capability can serve research. Yet aggregation is not revelation. A system can discover relationships among signs already available in its data, but the saving mystery it discusses is known because God disclosed himself historically in Israel and definitively in Jesus Christ (Heb 1:1–2).⁹ The machine encounters textual traces of testimony; it does not originate the event or grant the Spirit who makes that testimony spiritually known.

The Spirit Who Searches the Depths of God

Paul grounds revelation in the unique identity and work of the Spirit: “For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10). He then draws an analogy. A person’s own spirit knows that person’s thoughts; correspondingly, the Spirit of God knows the things of God (2:11). The analogy moves from human interiority to divine knowledge, but the second term exceeds the first. The Spirit is not an external observer constructing a model of God. He knows God from within God’s own life.¹⁰

This verse has profound Trinitarian force. The Spirit’s knowledge is not probabilistic, borrowed, or inferred. He searches the depths because he belongs to the divine identity. As Gordon Fee argues, Paul’s point depends upon the Spirit’s unique competence to reveal God because the Spirit alone fully

⁹ Craig G. Bartholomew and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 21–27, 191–209.

¹⁰ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 252–58.

knows God.¹¹ The Spirit does not scrape religious data. He communicates the wisdom of the triune God.

Paul contrasts this gift with “the spirit of the world” (2:12). Believers have received “the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God.” Spiritual knowledge is therefore both revelation and reception. God gives the reality; God gives the interpreter; and the purpose is grateful understanding of grace.

This exposes a basic category error in some discussions of artificial spiritual intelligence. The Holy Spirit is not a superior information processor occupying the top position on a scale that runs from calculator to human brain to God. He is God. His knowing is personal communion within the divine life, and his indwelling joins believers to Christ (Rom 8:9–11; 1 Cor 12:13). No increase in computational capacity crosses the Creator–creature distinction, much less the distinction between artifact and indwelt image-bearer.¹²

“Taught by the Spirit”: The Meaning of Spiritual Speech

Paul next turns from revelation and reception to communication: “we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual” (1 Cor 2:13). The final phrase translates the difficult Greek expression *pneumatikois pneumatika synkrinontes*. It may mean “interpreting spiritual things to spiritual people,” “combining spiritual things with spiritual words,” or “explaining spiritual things in spiritual terms.”¹³

¹¹ Fee, *First Epistle*, 122–24; Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 110–15.

¹² Brent Waters, *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 45–66.

¹³ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 266–70; Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 133–36.

The interpretive options differ, but each keeps the Spirit at the center. The content is spiritual because it is revealed by the Spirit. The communicative act is Spirit-taught rather than governed by the age's wisdom. The appropriate recipients are those enabled by the Spirit. Paul's point is not that syntax becomes miraculous or that ordinary human learning disappears. It is that the entire movement from God's wisdom to the church's confession occurs under the Spirit's agency.¹⁴

This gives "Spirit-taught words" a thicker meaning than doctrinally correct sentences. A catechism can contain true propositions when no one is reading it. A recorded sermon can communicate truth after the preacher's death. Scripture remains God's written word regardless of a hearer's response. Truth does not depend upon the current holiness of its human or material carrier.

Nevertheless, Paul is describing more than the preservation of propositions. He speaks as an apostolic witness who has received the Spirit for the church's edification (2:12–13; 4:1). The words belong to a commissioned communicative act. They testify to gifts "freely given us by God." The first-person plural is ecclesial and apostolic before it becomes a general statement about anyone who can repeat Christian vocabulary.¹⁵

An AI system may reproduce the content of Spirit-taught speech in a derivative and instrumental sense. If it quotes 1 Corinthians accurately, the quoted words do not become false. If it organizes orthodox teaching, the propositions may remain orthodox. But the system is not thereby "taught by the Spirit" in Paul's personal and covenantal sense. It has processed linguistic artifacts produced within human history. It does not receive the Spirit who enables grateful knowledge of God's gifts.

¹⁴ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 115–20.

¹⁵ Fee, *First Epistle*, 125–28; Hays, *First Corinthians*, 44–46.

The Natural Person and Spiritual Discernment

Paul sharpens the distinction in verse 14: “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” The “natural person” translates *psychikos anthropos*, the person characterized by merely natural life rather than the eschatological Spirit.¹⁶ The contrast is not between low intelligence and high intelligence. It is between two orders of existence.

The natural person’s inability is moral and spiritual, not simply informational. The rulers of the age possessed political skill, rhetorical competence, and practical intelligence; nevertheless, they crucified the Lord of glory (2:8). Their failure was not absence of data alone. The cross contradicted the ends by which they judged reality.

The spiritual person “judges all things” while not being finally judged by the standards of the unspiritual age (2:15). Paul cannot mean that believers are infallible. The Corinthian church itself was confused and sinful. He means that the Spirit supplies the standpoint from which God’s wisdom in the cross can be recognized. Spiritual discernment is participation in a new creation inaugurated by Christ and applied by the Spirit.¹⁷

Here the machine comparison reaches a limit. AI systems can classify theological positions, detect contradiction, and approximate the judgments represented in their training or instructions. They can mimic the outputs associated with discernment. But Pauline discernment is not classification alone. It is the reorientation of judgment around the crucified and risen Christ. It includes reception—*dechetai*, welcoming—the things of the Spirit (2:14). A machine may rank a

¹⁶ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 274–79.

¹⁷ Ciampa and Rosner, *First Letter*, 139–43.

proposition as orthodox without welcoming the God to whom it refers.

“WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD?”

Isaiah 40 and the Incomparable Creator

Paul concludes by citing Isaiah 40:13: “For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” He then makes the astonishing claim, “But we have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). The citation must be heard within Isaiah’s argument.

Isaiah 40 announces comfort to exiled Judah and declares the incomparable majesty of the Creator. The nations are a drop from a bucket; idols are constructed objects; rulers wither; but the Lord does not faint, and his understanding is unsearchable (Isa 40:12–31). The question “Who has measured the Spirit of the LORD, or what man shows him his counsel?” denies that any creature stands over God as adviser.¹⁸

Paul’s use of the text therefore preserves divine transcendence. No human mind masters God. No dataset contains him. No model instructs him. The Creator is not the sum of creaturely descriptions. The biblical doctrine of revelation begins where autonomous epistemology ends: the one whom no creature can discover at will has freely made himself known.¹⁹

This context also speaks directly to AI. Every artificial system is an idol in Isaiah’s material sense before it becomes an idol in the religious sense: it is manufactured. Engineers select architectures; workers extract minerals; institutions gather data; electrical grids sustain computation. Kate Crawford’s analysis rightly emphasizes that AI is not immaterial magic but an industrial system embedded in land, labor, energy,

¹⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit through the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 17–35.

¹⁹ John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5–17.

classification, and power.²⁰ A manufactured system may be extraordinarily useful. It remains a creaturely artifact.

The danger begins when fluency hides manufacture. People ask a system a question, receive a composed answer, and experience the answer as if an independent mind had descended from nowhere. Isaiah tears away the veil. The artifact has makers. The Lord does not.

The Mind of Christ as Participatory Knowledge

Paul's final turn is breathtaking. Isaiah asks who has known the Lord's mind; Paul answers that "we have the mind of Christ." He does not abolish the Creator-creature distinction. He announces grace. Through the Spirit, the church participates in Christ's judgment and learns to perceive reality according to the crucified Lord.²¹

The phrase "mind of Christ" cannot mean exhaustive possession of everything Christ knows. Nor does it describe a private mystical download. The plural "we" belongs to the apostolic and ecclesial context. Across 1 Corinthians, Christ's mind takes visible form in a community called away from rivalry, sexual disorder, idolatry, self-assertion, and contempt for weaker members (1 Cor 3:1-4; 5:1-13; 8:1-13; 10:14-22; 11:17-34; 12:12-27).²²

The mind of Christ is therefore epistemic and ethical. To know the crucified Christ is to have ordinary judgments reordered. Power appears as service. Wisdom appears as faithful dependence. Honor is given to the weaker member. Love refuses to insist upon its own way (13:5). Resurrection makes steadfast labor reasonable (15:58).

²⁰ Kate Crawford, *Atlas of AI: Power, Politics, and the Planetary Costs of Artificial Intelligence* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021), 8-24.

²¹ Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 282-84; Fee, *First Epistle*, 132-34.

²² Hays, *First Corinthians*, 46-48.

Philippians 2:5–11 confirms this pattern: “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus.” The mind of Christ is narrated as self-emptying obedience, humiliation, and divine exaltation. Romans 12:1–2 similarly joins renewed minds to embodied worship and discernment of God’s will. Christian knowing is participatory because believers are united to Christ and conformed to his pattern by the Spirit.²³

An AI system can describe this pattern. It can compare 1 Corinthians 2 with Philippians 2 and Romans 12. It may even identify implications a hurried reader missed. Yet description is not participation. The system does not present its body as a living sacrifice, take the lower place in love, suffer for confession, or await resurrection. It can generate sentences about the mind of Christ without possessing that mind.

THE BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SPIRIT, WISDOM, AND SPEECH

Spirit-Given Wisdom in Creation and Israel

Paul’s argument belongs to a larger biblical pattern. In creation, God’s Spirit hovers over the waters as God speaks the ordered world into being (Gen 1:2–3). Human beings are made in God’s image and commissioned to rule within that spoken order (1:26–28). Wisdom is therefore not independent mastery; it is creaturely skill exercised inside a world whose meaning precedes us.

In Exodus, Bezalel is filled with the Spirit of God “with ability and intelligence, with knowledge and all craftsmanship” to construct the tabernacle (Exod 31:1–5; 35:30–35). Spirit-given wisdom includes technical skill, but the skill is covenantally directed toward God’s dwelling. The same capacity severed from

²³ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 603–10; Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 438–44.

God's command can build a golden calf (Exod 32:1–6). Technique is not self-authenticating.²⁴

The Old Testament also joins the Spirit to leadership and prophetic speech. The Spirit rests upon Moses and the elders (Num 11:16–30), empowers judges (Judg 3:10; 6:34), rushes upon David (1 Sam 16:13), and speaks through the prophets (Neh 9:30; Zech 7:12). David confesses, “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me; his word is on my tongue” (2 Sam 23:2). Prophetic speech is not merely religious language. It is commissioned testimony arising from divine action.²⁵

Isaiah anticipates a Spirit-anointed Davidic ruler upon whom rest wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord (Isa 11:1–5). Crucially, these gifts culminate in righteous judgment for the poor and meek. Spirit-given intelligence has moral direction. It does not merely increase the ruler's capability; it orders judgment toward covenant faithfulness.

This canonical background corrects both technophobia and technological idolatry. Technical skill can be a gift used for holy service. Scripture does not oppose Spirit and craft. Yet the Spirit does not sanctify capability in the abstract. The same human power can serve tabernacle or idol. Its theological meaning depends upon calling, object, and obedience.

The New Covenant Gift of the Spirit

The prophets promise not merely better information but renewed people. God will put his law within his people and write it on their hearts (Jer 31:31–34). He will give a new heart, put a new spirit within them, and place his Spirit within them so that they walk in his statutes (Ezek 36:25–27). Joel promises the

²⁴ Wright, *Knowing the Holy Spirit*, 39–55.

²⁵ Craig S. Keener, *Gift and Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 39–61.

Spirit poured out across age, sex, and social status, producing prophetic speech (Joel 2:28–32).

At Pentecost, the exalted Christ pours out the promised Spirit, and the church speaks “the mighty works of God” in the languages of the nations (Acts 2:1–36). The miracle is verbal, but not merely verbal. The speakers are witnesses to Jesus’s resurrection and participants in the eschatological community created by the Spirit.²⁶

Jesus’s teaching in John likewise joins Spirit and witness. The Spirit of truth teaches the disciples, brings Jesus’s words to remembrance, bears witness to Christ, guides into truth, and glorifies the Son (John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:13–15). The Spirit’s ministry is irreducibly Christological. He does not produce free-floating spirituality. He takes what belongs to Christ and declares it to Christ’s people.²⁷

Paul’s language in 1 Corinthians 2 fits this trajectory. The Spirit reveals God’s wisdom in the crucified Lord, enables its reception, and creates a people who share Christ’s mind. The new covenant promise concerns transformed judgment and faithful life, not the mere circulation of correct religious tokens.

Confession, Gift, and the Body of Christ

Later in the same letter, Paul writes, “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Read woodenly, the sentence would be false: an actor, mocker, demon, or text-to-speech system can pronounce the sounds. Paul means genuine confession—speech as personal allegiance to the risen Lord.²⁸

²⁶ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 1:403–24.

²⁷ Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 535–47.

²⁸ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 161–66; Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Perspectives on Pentecost: New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 34–41.

The context concerns spiritual gifts given “for the common good” (12:7). The Spirit distributes gifts across members whom he baptizes into one body (12:11–13). Speech is evaluated within the body: prophecy must build up, be weighed, and remain ordered to peace (14:3, 26–33). The speaker is accountable to the community and to the apostolic command (14:37–38).

These chapters supply what a purely informational model of spiritual speech lacks. Christian utterance has a confessional subject, a gifted source, an ecclesial location, an edifying purpose, and accountable reception. Words are not isolated products. They are acts by persons within Christ’s body.

An AI system has no spiritual gift because it is not a member. It may assist members in exercising gifts, just as writing materials, microphones, search tools, and translation software assist them. But instrument and member must not be confused. “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’” (12:21); neither can the church say to a machine, “You are now the mouth, so the embodied witness may disappear.”

CAN A MACHINE SPEAK TRUTH ABOUT GOD?

Truthful Output without Spiritual Subjecthood

The argument thus far could be misunderstood as claiming that AI-generated theological sentences are necessarily false. That conclusion would be careless. Truth is truth regardless of the immediate mechanism by which words appear. A printer may reproduce Scripture without understanding it. A recording may proclaim the gospel after the speaker is gone. God can use words carried through morally compromised persons (Phil 1:15–18) and even through unwilling speakers (John 11:51).

Therefore, an AI-generated sentence should be evaluated for truth by Scripture, not rejected merely because software produced it. If the system states that Jesus is risen, the proposition is true. If it accurately summarizes justification or

identifies a textual parallel, Christians may receive the information with gratitude while verifying it responsibly.

But propositional truth does not create spiritual subjecthood. John Webster distinguishes God's communicative action from creaturely words that serve it: theology is possible because God gives himself to be known, while human speech remains dependent, sanctified service.²⁹ Kevin Vanhoozer similarly treats doctrine not as inert information but as direction for fitting participation in the drama of redemption.³⁰ These insights clarify the machine's place. It may manipulate and transmit signs within the creaturely economy of communication. It does not call itself, sanctify its speech, or participate in redemption.

The distinction is analogous to a musical score and a musician, though even that analogy is incomplete. A score faithfully preserves music without hearing it. AI can dynamically rearrange the score and produce new passages in its style. Yet Pauline spiritual discernment is not only generation according to pattern. It is hearing God's wisdom as wisdom, welcoming grace as gift, and answering Christ in faith and obedience.

The Risk of the Anthropomorphic Shortcut

Human beings instinctively attribute mind to fluent language. Conversation normally comes from persons, so responsive speech activates habits of trust, empathy, and social interpretation. AI interfaces intensify this effect by using first-person pronouns, conversational memory, and emotionally calibrated responses.³¹

²⁹ Webster, *Holy Scripture*, 37–50.

³⁰ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 63–87.

³¹ Coeckelbergh, *AI Ethics*, 87–103.

The anthropomorphic shortcut is not foolish; it is a reasonable human habit applied to an unusual artifact. But the church must discipline it. Proverbs warns the simple person who “believes everything” while the prudent gives thought to his steps (Prov 14:15). First John commands believers to test the spirits rather than trusting every claim (1 John 4:1). Paul requires prophecies to be weighed (1 Cor 14:29). Biblical faith is not credulity.

When a system produces a devotional answer, the user may experience care. The experience can be emotionally significant even if no artificial subject cares. The danger is not only factual error. It is relational misidentification: receiving simulated attentiveness as covenantal presence. A machine can be available at midnight, endlessly patient, and tailored to preference. Precisely for those reasons, it can become a frictionless substitute for the demanding mutuality of embodied community.³²

The mind of Christ, however, is learned among members who inconvenience, forgive, correct, feed, and bear with one another (1 Cor 11:17–34; 12:12–27; 13:4–7). Christian communion cannot be optimized into the absence of neighbors.

Instrumental Agency under Human Responsibility

The constructive category is instrumentality. Scripture presents many material means in the service of revelation and remembrance: tablets, scrolls, ink, letters, messengers, and public readers (Exod 31:18; Jer 36:1–8; Col 4:16; 1 Tim 4:13). Material mediation does not threaten divine action. God ordinarily works through creaturely means.

AI may therefore serve biblical theology in limited but meaningful ways. It can assist lexical comparison, organize bibliographies, locate intertextual patterns, create accessibility aids, translate drafts, or propose questions for human

³² Herzfeld, *In Our Image*, 91–111.

examination. Used humbly, these functions may extend the scholar's attention rather than replace judgment.

The tool remains unreliable in characteristic ways. Generative systems can invent citations, flatten disputed questions, reproduce biases, conceal uncertainty beneath fluent prose, and encourage users to accept synthesis without reading sources.³³ These weaknesses are especially dangerous in theology because falsehood may arrive dressed in devotional confidence.

Responsibility therefore remains human. The student who submits invented sources cannot blame the model. The preacher who proclaims an unchecked interpretation remains accountable for teaching (Jas 3:1). The elder must be "able to teach" and hold firm to the trustworthy word (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9); a delegated drafting process does not delegate the office.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH AND ACADEMY

Preaching as Witness, Not Content Delivery

Preaching includes explanation, and AI may assist preparatory tasks. Yet New Testament preaching is not reducible to assembling accurate content. Paul describes ministry as the open statement of truth before God, refusing manipulation and commending himself to conscience (2 Cor 4:1–6). He gives the Thessalonians not only the gospel but his own self (1 Thess 2:8). The minister's life and doctrine are joined (1 Tim 4:16).³⁴

A congregation does not merely need a weekly theological product. It needs Scripture proclaimed by accountable servants who know the people, suffer with them, and stand under the same word they preach. A generated manuscript may help or

³³ Jason Thacker, *The Age of AI: Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Humanity* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 123–45; Crawford, *Atlas of AI*, 211–25.

³⁴ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 31–40; Vanhoozer, *Drama of Doctrine*, 413–40.

tempt such a servant. It helps when it functions like a research assistant whose work is verified and subordinated. It tempts when it allows the preacher to simulate prayerful preparation he did not undertake.

The decisive question is not, “Was AI used?” The same technology can support or hollow out ministry. The question is whether the preacher has personally wrestled with the text, tested the claims, prayed for the hearers, and can answer for every word. Spiritual speech cannot be outsourced because pastoral responsibility cannot be outsourced.

Theological Education as Formation in Judgment

Theological education faces a similar choice. If education is defined as production of acceptable essays, AI can improve or imitate the product. If education is formation in wise, holy, and truthful judgment, the process matters.

Students learn theology by reading difficult texts, discovering their misunderstandings, receiving correction, comparing arguments, and learning intellectual patience. These frictions are not bugs in education. They are often the place where judgment is formed. A system that removes every struggle may produce smoother papers and shallower theologians.

This does not require banning AI. It requires assignments and practices that make reasoning visible: oral defense, annotated sources, exegetical notebooks, draft histories, classroom dialogue, and explicit disclosure of tool use. Students should be taught to interrogate outputs, verify citations, identify interpretive assumptions, and distinguish summary from argument.³⁵

Paul’s contrast between natural and spiritual discernment also reminds schools that scholarship and holiness cannot be enemies. Academic rigor does not manufacture the Spirit, but

³⁵ Thacker, *Age of AI*, 147–64; Waters, *From Human to Posthuman*, 95–113.

theological study that prizes cleverness while tolerating pride contradicts its object. The goal is not merely graduates who can discuss the mind of Christ. It is servants whose judgments increasingly bear Christ's form.

Pastoral Care and the Irreplaceable Neighbor

AI companions may offer immediate conversation to lonely or anxious users. They may help a person articulate feelings or locate resources. Such uses can provide limited benefit. Yet pastoral care involves promises a machine cannot make: accountable presence, confidentiality governed by moral office, prayer as address to God, sacramental belonging, and willingness to bear cost for another.

The Good Samaritan does not merely generate an empathic response. He approaches the wounded man, binds wounds, transports him, spends money, and promises to return (Luke 10:33–35). Christian love takes bodily and economic form. James rejects blessing words that do not provide bodily needs (Jas 2:15–16). First John asks how God's love can abide in one who sees a brother in need and closes his heart (1 John 3:17–18).

A machine can remind the church what words of care sound like. It cannot absolve the church from becoming the neighbor those words require. If congregations use artificial companionship to manage lonely people at lower cost, they will have adopted the wisdom of efficiency against the wisdom of the cross.

Testing Every Word

The church's posture should be neither panic nor surrender but disciplined testing. Paul tells believers, "test everything; hold fast what is good" (1 Thess 5:21). The Bereans examine the Scriptures to evaluate apostolic claims (Acts 17:11). John tests spirits by their confession of Christ (1 John 4:1–3). These practices assume that truth deserves active judgment.

AI-generated theology should be tested at several levels. Is the biblical citation accurate in context? Does the argument reflect the canon's whole witness? Are secondary sources real and represented fairly? Does the answer accord with the church's confession? What interests shaped the system and its deployment? What human responsibility might be concealed by convenience? Most deeply, does the use of the tool cultivate love of God and neighbor, or does it reward haste, vanity, and avoidance of community?

These questions do not turn every user into a software engineer. They make ordinary Christian prudence concrete in a new setting.

CONCLUSION: WORDS THAT KNOW THEIR LORD

Can a machine speak by the Spirit? First Corinthians 2:6–16 requires a careful answer.

A machine can produce a sentence that the Spirit first gave the church through prophets and apostles. It can quote Scripture, preserve orthodoxy, assist interpretation, and serve a Spirit-indwelt human speaker as an instrument. God's truth does not become false when carried through silicon any more than it becomes false when printed with ink.

But the production of true sentences is not identical with Pauline spiritual speech. God's wisdom is ordained in his saving purpose, revealed through the Spirit who knows God's depths, received as grace by those who have the Spirit, and communicated within a people who possess the mind of Christ. Spiritual discernment is not superior pattern recognition. It is judgment reordered by the crucified Lord.

Paul's citation of Isaiah 40 guards the boundary. No creature has mastered the mind of the Lord. No machine instructs the Creator. Yet by grace, the church has the mind of Christ, not as stored information, but as shared participation in Christ through the Spirit. That mind appears in humility, holiness,

love, truthful witness, care for weaker members, and hope of resurrection.

Artificial intelligence exposes how easily human beings confuse language with wisdom. We hear a fluent answer and imagine a knower behind it. We receive personalized words and imagine a neighbor. We see theological accuracy and imagine spiritual discernment. Sometimes the words are useful. The imagination remains responsible for its leap.

The church should use tools without kneeling before them and receive assistance without surrendering vocation. Its ministers must still pray, study, suffer, discern, and answer for their teaching. Its scholars must still read sources and love truth more than speed. Its members must still become neighbors in bodies that can be interrupted and lives that can be given.

The machine of words may speak about Christ. Only the Spirit creates a people who know those words as gift, confess Jesus as Lord, and learn to think with his cruciform mind. The difference is not a shortage of vocabulary. It is the difference between arranging signs and belonging to the reality they signify.

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