

All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall

Are people naturally good or naturally evil?

Many people, including some Christians, think that there is at least a little bit of good in everyone. Thinkers in the past called human beings “blank slates.” Many of us have grown up with the idea that children are basically good and that it's only the corrupt adult world that makes them “lose their innocence.”

But what does the Bible say? “All alike are under the power of sin.... There is no one righteous, not even one” (Romans 3:9–10). Despite how it might seem to us, the Bible says that all of us are unclean. Our best acts of righteousness “are like filthy rags” (Isaiah 64:6). Sin is a feature shared by all humanity. Everyone is infected with it. Everyone shares in its guilt. Every new child who is born is born with sin. Christians call this concept “original sin.”

“All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall” is a hymn about original sin. It was written very early in the Reformation, at a time when many Christians did not understand original sin correctly. The Reformers did not want the Bible's doctrines to only be debated by intellectuals. They understood that music has an incredibly powerful ability to help us learn and remember important truths. One of their main goals was to create “teaching hymns” to help Christians understand what the Bible says. Even today, “All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall” is one of the best summaries of original sin ever written.

The hymn draws together the different passages from the Bible that talk about what we all are by nature. It calls us to see that we are born as sinners. In the end, it brings us to see how Jesus is the answer to all of our sin. It tells us that we have been made right with God through him.

The hymn starts by taking us to the world's creation and to the first human beings: Adam and Eve. In the beginning, God created people to be naturally good. According to Genesis 1:27, God made Adam and Eve “in his own image.” They reflected God's glory, his goodness, his mastery over creation.

But even a surface-level look at the world, or at even our own hearts, tells us that humans aren't a perfect image of God anymore. Everything changed when Adam and Eve fell. Together, they committed the first sin. They chose to disregard God's commands and listen to Satan instead (Genesis 3). Their choice brought sin into the world for all their descendants—all of humanity (Romans 5:12). “All mankind fell in Adam's fall.”

After Adam and Eve fell, everything in the world fell under God's curse (Genesis 3:16–19). God had made humans to live forever. Now,

they would now die (Genesis 3:19). Because sinful people cannot live in God's presence, God sent Adam and Eve away from him (Genesis 3:23).

That barrier between people and God remains today. We're born into a broken world and a human race that sees God as an enemy. The Bible pictures the world as "groaning" in its sinful and painful situation (Romans 8:22). Worse still, a day is coming when all the world must face judgment for its sins. "Over all," the hymn says, "God's wrath descends."

In spite of what our society would tell us, corruption does not only come from outside of us. We are sinful from the moment we are conceived (Psalm 51:5). As the hymn says, our hearts are "depraved" and "prone (inclined) to evil." Sin keeps us in "bondage"—"everyone who sins is a slave to sin" (John 8:34). And as the third stanza points out, we aren't even able to reach out to God for help. Our situation is dreadful. The Bible comes to a sad conclusion: "Death came to all people, because all sinned" (Romans 5:12).

But Jesus changes everything. The fourth stanza uses an interesting title for Jesus: "the second Adam." The Bible uses this name to point out that Jesus came to undo the problem that Adam began. 1 Corinthians 15:22 says, "As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive."

The fifth stanza says that Jesus "took our place." He bore "our sin, our woe, our shame." Jesus did that on the cross. Even though he was perfect, he took upon himself the sins of the entire world. He suffered God's wrath and judgment for those sins. And he fully paid for them. He gives us a new way to be right with God—through faith in him. He rebuilt the relationship that Adam had broken.

Where does that leave us? In a place of pure joy! The final stanza leads us in a prayer of praise to God for all his blessings. God has made everything new for us. And when Jesus comes again, God will remake all of creation to be the perfect way it was before Adam sinned: free from all fallenness, brokenness, sin, and death.

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"All Mankind Fell in Adam's Fall" was originally written by Lazarus Spengler (1479–1534), a personal friend of Martin Luther and an early supporter of the Reformation. Originally from Nuremberg, Germany, Spengler worked in government there and first met Luther in 1518. Spengler was present alongside Luther for many important events, and he made major contributions to early systems of Lutheran education.

The English version of this hymn, however, was largely rewritten by its translator, Matthias Loy (1828–1915). Loy was a pastor in the Ohio Synod and the president of Capital University in Columbus, Ohio.