

Refrigerator-Magnet Theology: True or False?

How many magnets grace the front of your refrigerator? One? Five? Twelve?

Refrigerator magnets can be silly, serious or snarky. They can be cute, corny or classy.

Refrigerator magnets have also generated much theology that sounds good—but isn't.

Consider these catchy quotes:

- "God never gives us more than we can handle."
- "Cleanliness is next to godliness."
- "God helps those who help themselves."
- "We're all God's children."

Phrases passed down from generation to generation. Easily remembered sound bites with a whisper of biblical wisdom, a hint of Christianity ... and a bucketful of error.

Let's look at these four examples:

'God never gives us more than we can handle.'

This probably originated with 1 Corinthians 10:13:

"No temptation has taken you except what is common to man. God is faithful, and He will not permit you to be tempted above what you can endure, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that you may be able to bear it."

As you can see, the context of this verse is temptation. God always provides a way for us to stand against temptation. But what about other life experiences? Let's face it, most of us have experienced situations way beyond what we can handle on our own. The key in that last sentence is the phrase "on our

own.”

We live in a fallen, sin-sick world. Tragedy strikes. Suffering happens. Betrayal blindsides us. Most of the time, it is indeed more than we can handle on our own.

But Christians are never “on our own.” We have the presence of the Holy Spirit in us to strengthen, guide and give wisdom. When God allows us to experience more than we can handle ourselves, it’s an invitation to run to the One who provides what we need when we depend on Him.

‘Cleanliness is next to godliness.’

This phrase probably developed in response to all the Bible verses that reference being cleansed—verses such as:

“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

“You are already clean through the word which I have spoken to you” (John 15:3).

But once again, if we examine the context, we’ll see these verses are talking about being cleansed from sin, not from physical dirt. (Although my mother may disagree).

‘God helps those who help themselves.’

This phrase does not appear anywhere in Scripture.

One of the biggest traps we can fall into spiritually is thinking that we must help ourselves before God will help us. The difference between Christianity and every other religion is that we cannot help ourselves into heaven. God has accomplished all that we need for our salvation. Consider Romans 5:6:

“While we were yet weak, in due time Christ died for the

ungodly” (Rom. 5:6).

God helps the helpless.

‘We’re all God’s children.’

This phrase is more wishful thinking than anything else, because John 1:12, NASB, tells us:

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name.”

Becoming a child of God does not happen by physical birth, it happens when we receive the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. At that moment, we are adopted into God’s family. In case you think this verse is the only one that teaches this, consider Galatians 4:4-5, MEV:

“But when the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son, born from a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.”

We are all created by God, for He is the One who gives physical life. Becoming a child of God—being adopted into His family—comes through faith in Jesus Christ.

Let’s guard against believing a statement because it sounds good or because it has been passed down from generation to generation. A refrigerator magnet is not the best source for sound theology. Check it against God’s Word to know, beyond any doubt, what is truly true. {eo}

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