

## TOP 10 REASONS WHY PEOPLE OF FAITH SHOULD OPPOSE WAL-MART

By Chris Pieper

### **10. First and Second Commandments: “You shall have no other gods before me,” and “You shall not worship idols.”**

Wal-Mart is the world’s largest retailer. Wal-Mart’s very existence depends on the false idolatry of money-worship and consumerism. They want us to define ourselves by what we have and what we buy, rather than who we are and how treat one another. Wal-Mart puts dollars first and people last.

### **9. Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the meek,” and “Blessed are the peacemakers.”**

Does a 200,000 sq. foot Wal-Mart sound “meek” to you? Secondly, “peacemakers” ordinarily are engaged in and believe in dialogue with all interested parties. Wal-Mart and Lincoln Properties have been notoriously absent and often downright resistant to listening to the communities most affected by their actions.

### **8. The Buddha’s Noble Eightfold Path: *Sila*, meaning moral behavior, includes “right actions.”**

*Right action* prohibits voluntarily taking part in action that harms others. The potential construction of this Wal-Mart in the middle of a thriving residential neighborhood would forever alter the peace and harmony of this beautiful part of Austin. It also threatens to ruin hundreds of small businesses that make a home in North Austin. There is no more direct definition of “harm.”

### **7. In the Old Testament, poverty is second only to idolatry as the most prominent theme.**

In the New Testament, one of every sixteen verses is about the poor. In the Gospels, the number is one out of every ten verses. In the Gospel of Luke, its one of every seven, and in the book of James, one of every five verses." (Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics*, 1994), p. 149. How does Wal-Mart treat poor people? The bottom line is that Wal-Mart *creates* huge classes of the poor. First it destroys existing mom-and-pop businesses, which often pay well and offer competitive benefits. Second, it perpetuates poverty through its disgraceful wage policies. Finally, it adds insult to injury by refusing to allow its working poor employees to unionize.

### **6. Genesis 1.26-28: “Then God said, Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”<sup>27</sup> I Peter 4: 10: “Like good stewards of the manifold grace of God, serve one another with whatever gift each of you have received.”**

God calls human beings to be responsible stewards of this splendid creation. Wal-Mart has a scandalous environmental record, with hundreds of EPA violations ranging from fuel tank leakages, water and air quality violations, to lack of erosion control. Not to mention the precious natural green spaces lost by the pouring thousands of tons of concrete and asphalt to build massive Supercenters.

**5. “By what right to you crush my people,” he declares, “and how do you dare to bash the face of the poor who cry out to Me”? (Isaiah 3, 14-15)**

Our God is a spirit of pure justice and pure love. God especially lives in the hearts and experience of the most vulnerable, such as the immigrant, the child, and the laborer. Therefore, people of faith are called to see that God’s justice is realized for these beloved groups in civil society. Yet companies such as Wal-Mart are frequent exploiters of young people, immigrants, and women. Wal-Marts in Oregon in 2003 were found guilty of forcing employees to work overtime without pay. A 2004 report leaked to the New York Times found 1,371 violations of child labor laws in a single week. In 2005, Wal-Marts in three states paid federal penalties for forcing teenage employees to operate chainsaws and other hazardous equipment.

**4. The Quran says: “And swallow not up the property of others by false means.” (Al Baqarah 2:188)**

Wal-Mart and Lincoln Properties have been dishonest, secretive, and undemocratic in their dealings with those most affected by their ideas, especially local neighborhoods. These wealthy corporations are not dealing in good will with city leaders or with people like you and me. At best, it is unethical; more likely immoral.

**3. 1 Cor 12:12-14, 24-27: “For the body does not consist of one member but of many.... But God has so composed the body... that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.”**

We are all intricately interconnected, even more so now than when this scripture was first written. The invasion of Wal-Mart and other megastores into our communities is a fundamental threat to the well-being of *all Austinites*. Whether you live across the street from Northcross, or far away in Circle C, this issue speaks to our identity as a city and what we want our future to look like. We must stand shoulder to shoulder and determine our own destiny.

**2. Isaiah 41:10: “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”**

Scripture calls us to stand up for what is right even when the odds are against us. The forces against us are often formidable. It is easy to become discouraged. But history tells us that even a small group of dedicated people, driven by their convictions and faith, cannot be denied. Let us then act bravely and pray for God’s strength and help.

**1. James 2:17-18: “Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith, and I have works.’ Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works.”**

As believers, we are called not merely to mouth the words of scripture or to attend our places of worship, but to live everyday the teachings of our creeds. We must let the core values of our traditions shine through in our daily practice. What are these values? Though our faiths are many, these values are few and timeless: Love. Compassion. Generosity. Peace. Service. Justice. We can act on these common values by taking faith-filled, righteous stances against immoral firms like Wal-Mart, refusing to do business with them, and refusing to let them colonize our community. And more importantly, we can respond with a hopeful, alternative vision for Austin that embodies the highest of these values.

The Old Testament tells its own version of our challenge. In that story, Wal-Mart was named Goliath. The brave but small hero was named David. We all know how that turned out.