



Would Jesus Value Everyday Low Prices on Robes and Sandals at Wal-Mart?

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The Left is increasingly fond of invoking the expression “What Would Jesus Do?” every time they mount their hobby horse of social justice complaints. Their selective application of the “Jesus standard” is false, unfair, and presumptuous.

The latest “What Would Jesus Do?” campaign targets Wal-Mart. Critics of Wal-Mart, the super store giant, have enlisted the aid of 65 clergy (including the Rev. Jesse Jackson) to force the company to increase employee wages and benefits. “Wake Up Wal-Mart,” as the campaign is dubbed, has begun a television campaign and distributed a letter signed by the clergy that states that Jesus Christ would not shop at Wal-Mart. They argue that good Christians should boycott the retail giant.

“Wake Up Wal-Mart” is funded by the United Food and Commercial Workers union. This is no spontaneous social justice campaign. It is political agitprop cloaked in the shroud of religious rhetoric.

The campaign insists that “Wal-Mart’s so-called low prices come at a high cost to the moral virtues and greatness of your workers, our families, and our nation.” Their television ad says: “Our faith teaches us ‘Do unto others as you would have them do unto you’” then asks the view “If these are our values, should people of faith shop at Wal-Mart this holiday season?”

What exactly is Wal-Mart doing that is so immoral? The company reports that it pays an average hourly wage across the U.S. of \$9.68. In Austin, the average wage for a Wal-Mart employee is \$10.69, *more than twice* the Federal minimum wage, \$5.15 per hour.

Nonetheless, “Wake Up Wal-Mart” claims that Wal-Mart’s workplace conditions are substandard, even dangerous, and the supposedly low pay and benefits are insufficient compensation. In reality, if a Wal-Mart employee wants better pay, better benefits, a better work environment, or better *anything*, she is free to seek out another job. Wal-Mart binds no one to servitude, despite liberal groaning.

And just how does Wal-Mart “do unto” the nation and local communities? The Wal-Mart & Sam’s Club Foundation, the largest corporate cash giving foundation in the U.S., will give more than \$200 million in cash and donations through 2005. In 2004, Wal-Mart gave over \$16 million to Texas causes and charities, and garnered an additional \$9 million in in-kind donations and funds raised through stores. For Texas, Wal-Mart’s 2004 giving totals nearly \$26 million.

Furthermore, despite having hundreds of its own stores closed and/or damaged by Hurricane Katrina, Wal-Mart was among the first responders to the disaster-stricken region. Published reports demonstrate that Wal-Mart outperformed local, state and federal emergency responders in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. The company’s uncompensated commitment to the community devastated by Katrina was without parallel. Remember, it is the American Red Cross under investigation for fraud, not Wal-Mart.

Not only does “Wake Up Wal-Mart” twist Biblical passages for its own purposes, it misquotes the scripture. The letter purportedly quotes Deuteronomy 25:13-15: “Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy ... lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.”

Get out your Bible. Deuteronomy 25:13-15 dictates that weights should be perfect and just, not diverse. Of all the clergy who signed onto the letter that lambastes Wal-Mart for its immorality and alleged failure to follow the Golden Rule, it appears not one of them caught the error. And maybe that’s the root of this problem: the clergy involved with this campaign are political activists, unfamiliar with the virtues of market economics and blindly idealistic about the social responsibilities of any corporation.

Wal-Mart is a business which the American people clearly value: shelves stocked with items they need (or want) at prices that alleviate financial pressure on the poor and underprivileged, while also benefiting millions of middle class shareholders who count on the firm’s financial success. The company pays employees well above the federal minimum wage, and employs more people than any other company. It offers millions of dollars in cash to community efforts, and does even more when a crisis strikes.

Wal-Mart’s business model is based on the Golden Rule, and it works. And we’re betting Jesus would love the low, low prices.