

The Jesus Fatwah

Introduction

Love your Muslim Neighbor as Yourself

In Arabic, the word “fatwah” simply means “opinion” and, in a religious context, a fatwah is a spiritually instructive opinion, usually given as the answer to a question about religious law. Jesus was a master of the art of fatwah. His opinions, revered by Christians and Muslims alike, remain among the most beautiful and powerful fatwahs ever issued. Jesus pronounced what is perhaps the most famous of his fatwahs when a lawyer asked Jesus to name the greatest of all the commandments. He said, “Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength and love your neighbor as you love yourself.”

As with most fatwahs, Jesus didn’t invent his opinions about loving God or loving one’s neighbors. Rather, he found and quoted passages from his sacred text, the Jewish Torah. Many of Jesus’ contemporaries concurred with his most famous fatwah – and five centuries later Mohammad endorsed the Jesus fatwah when he said, “The most righteous person is the one who consents for other people what he consents for himself, and who dislikes for them what he dislikes for himself.”

Here at Living the Questions, our opinion—our fatwah—is this: Jesus meant it when he told us to love our neighbors. In an age of increasing Islamophobia, we believe it is especially important for Christians to love their Muslim neighbors, a process that begins when we learn who Muslims are and what Muslims actually believe. We’ve put this series together as a way of expressing faithfulness to the Jesus fatwah, and we’re happy you’ve joined us. As-Salaam-Alaikum!

-- David Felten & Jeff Procter-Murphy

Note: the English transliteration of the Arabic word, “fatwah,” can be spelled both with or without an “h” on the end. For the purposes of this study, we will be using “fatwah” instead of “fatwā.” Both are acceptable in English usage.

