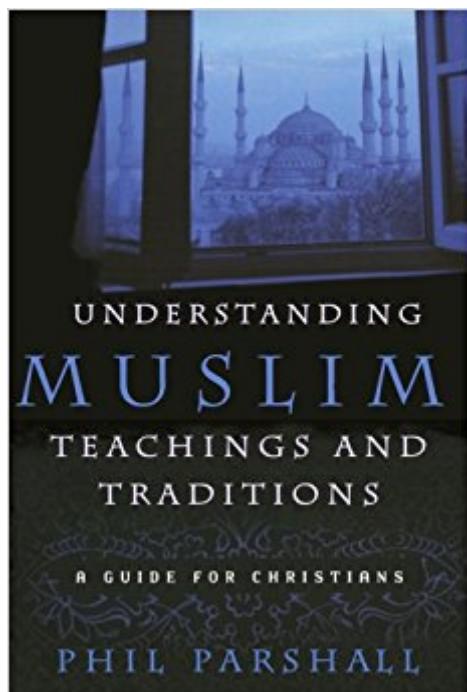


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Understanding Muslim Teachings And Traditions: A Guide For Christians



Synopsis

The sense of urgency to spread the gospel to Muslims has never been greater. Many Christians are turning new attention to the teachings of the Quran-yet few know even the basics of the Hadith, collections of Muslim teachings and traditions with deep influence on Muslim attitudes and actions. Phil Parshall's careful analysis of the Hadith is made authentic by his decades of ministry among Muslims. He explains the Hadith's teachings of Muhammad on such issues as salvation, prayer, jihad and violence, women, and Jesus. Here are essential insights for all those seeking an in-depth understanding of the Muslim faith and community.

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Customer Reviews

"For the first time, someone has researched the 4,705 pages of the nine-volume Hadith in order to give us an overall inside look at the Muslim community's traditions. Though as binding on faithful Muslims as the Qur'an, we know so little about it. We really appreciate Parshall's efforts to help us fill that gap in our knowledge." Dr. Andrew Ng, East Asia director, Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) "No Christian worker who desires to be effective among Muslims can afford to be ignorant of the Hadith." from the foreword by Dr. Greg Livingstone founder and director, FRONTIERSThe Traditions (Hadith) of Islam is a record of the words and deeds of Muhammad that overwhelmingly affects Muslim actions, morals, and attitudes. Though only a minority of Muslims has ever directly encountered a book of Hadith, the information is filtered through Islamic teachers and oral tradition. In this unique book, Phil Parshall explores and explains the Hadith's teachings on such issues as salvation, prayer, jihad and violence, women, and Jesus. He bases his book on the research of Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad Al-Bukhari, which is universally regarded as the most authoritative collection

of Traditions. Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions highlights the essence of this highly significant body of Muslim literature and will lead you to a greater awareness of Muhammad's influence in the lives of one billion people. Phil Parshall has served as a missionary in Muslim nations for forty years. He has graduate degrees from Wheaton Graduate School, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Fuller Seminary, and fellowships with Harvard and Yale Universities. Among his other books on Islam are Bridges to Islam and The Cross and the Crescent.

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Mr. Parshall was a Christian missionary working with and in Muslim countries. I love the work he has done concerning this book. He presents many of the teachings of the Hadith and writes of many of his encounters with the Muslim culture. In fact, there are times when the author has joined in on some of the Muslim traditions such as fasting. This is one of the many things I love about this book. Mr. Parshall does not "slam" the Islamic culture but only points out where Christians and Muslims differ and even points out areas where Christians can learn from Muslims when it comes to many of their disciplinary practices. The book is honest and frank and deals with many realities as opposed to many factual teachings concerning the Quran and the Hadiths. His writing is very diplomatic without being overly critical. He would make a great negotiator. So go ahead and invest a small amount of money and buy this book. It is enlightening, to the point and a very easy and enjoyable read. Thank you Phil Parshall for finding some peaceful ground for everyone to agree upon and for sticking to your Christian values in otherwise trying circumstances..

First published in 1994 titled as "Inside the Community: Understanding Muslims through Their Traditions" (ISBN:0801071321), 240 pgs. Paperback published in 2002 titled as "Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions" (ISBN:080106418-x), 240 pgs, with a slightly revised Introduction. The author has read the 9-volume Hadith (a written collection of traditions about what the Prophet Mohammad said or did) as collected by Al-Bukhari. The author quotes selections from Al-Bukhari to illustrate Muslim traditions in the following Topics: Quran; Salvation (sin, faith, good deeds); Muhammad; Miracles; Prayer (theological considerations, prayers forms, ablutions, call to prayer); Fasting (regulations); Pilgrimage (rituals); Almsgiving; Jihad and violence; Punishments for

Sin (pride, promiscuity, theft); Judgment Day; Hell (theology); Paradise; The supernatural world; Jesus; Women; Muhammad's wives; Legalism; Food; Medicine; A potpourri of teaching. This was written by a Christian evangelist to inform other missionaries as to the historical background as to why Muslims follow certain Islamic customs. Not a "deep" scholarly work, but contains enough citations from Al-Bukhari to support the selected topics -- along with his analysis as to the significance of each selection. Something for those who don't want to flip through all 9 volumes of Al-Bukhari to discover some understanding to the foundations of Islamic customs.

Introduction

“There is no deity except Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet.” (224). Such is the holy creed of millions adherents of the second largest religion in the world. In *Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions: A Guide for Christians*, Phil Parshall offers a systemic and worthwhile book that enables Christians to understand Islamic teachings and traditions. With a sincere desire for Muslims to embrace the Gospel of Christ, he carefully unearths the Hadith scriptures to equip Christians in their evangelism with Muslims. Phil Parshall has proven his stripes by going where few missionaries have dared to go before. He has served the Lord for over forty years in the Middle East as a missionary, earned several graduate degrees from prominent seminaries, and has written many books on Islam.

Summary

In chapters one through four, Phil Parshall plunges his Christian reader into the Islamic world by laying down the essentials for Islam. He begins by commenting on the inspiration, compilation, and application of the Quran. Believed by Muslims to be eternal, uncreated, and supreme over all religious texts, the Quran was communicated through the Prophet Muhammad by the Angel Gabriel in 632 AD (18). Within Islam, we learn that salvation can be only be found by the mercy of Allah (38). Continuing on, the author goes into the person of Muhammad and the miracles the Hadith claims he performed.

In chapters five through eight, Parshall explains prayer, fasting, pilgrimage, and almsgiving. Prayer is regarded as a “sacrament of union between Allah and his creation” to be observed reverently five times each day (62). Fasting is also mandated as a means to worship Allah. Mostly taking place during the month of Ramadan, millions of Muslims around the world abstain from eating, drinking, smoking, and having sexual relations during the day (74). The pilgrimage to Mecca (otherwise known as the Hajj) is also a commanded ritual for every Muslim (83). Finally, he unearths the Hadiths that reinforce the almsgiving of two and a half percent for the Islamic world (91). The author argues that Muslims are motivated to practice these good deeds as a means to earn merit toward heaven and receive forgiveness for sins (37).

In chapters nine through fourteen, Phil Parshall takes on a systematic approach to answer a plethora of Islamic theological

topics. Regarding jihad (holy war), Muslims are commanded to use violence as a means to convert infidels (103). The justification for their violence, they argue, is based on the authenticity of the Hadith (98). Concerning punishment for sin, judgment day, and hell, the author unravels the Hadith to show the gruesome and unmerciful disposition Allah and his Prophet have towards great sinners. The motive for submitting to Allah, Parshall shows, is to earn enough merit to reach Paradise and enjoy its rewards (many of which are sexual in nature) (142). Finally, he ends this section by highlighting the nature of Satan, Jinn, and other supernatural beings. In chapter fifteen, the author focuses on how the Hadith portrays Jesus Christ. He shows that Jesus is a prophet of Allah who will return at the end of time as a just ruler and disarm the blasphemous doctrines of Christianity (163). He also points out several bridges to the Gospel that the Hadith itself points out. Finally, in chapters sixteen through twenty one, Phil Parshall discusses a mixture of Hadiths that build a deeper understanding of Islamic culture and tradition. The author shows that, according to the Hadiths, women are offered the crumbs of Islamic spirituality and are regarded as lesser beings than men (165). The author then zooms into the slightly embarrassing historical accounts between Muhammad and his wives. Lastly, the author ends his book with topics regarding legalisms, food, and medicine.

Critical Evaluation

Today's Christian will be utterly hindered by his incapacity to deconstruct Islamic barriers to the Gospel if he cannot properly understand the reasoning and beliefs Muslims hold to. Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions: A Guide for Christians will prove to be an exceedingly useful tool for the Christian as he seeks to lovingly reach Muslims with the liberating truth of the Gospel. By quoting directly from the Hadith, Phil Parshall carefully comments and analyzes Islamic teachings and traditions for his readers to have a more wholesome understanding of this religion. The author's love for Muslims transcends through the pages of his book. Many authors of "Christian" books on Islam present an offensive, tactless, and bitter bias against the Islamic religion and their people. Phil Parshall does not. He successfully accomplishes the intention of his book (to provide a succinct understanding of Islam through the Hadith) and does so with a clear love for the people of which he writes about. This is most explicit in his introduction where he states his love for Muslims despite their aggression in murdering his close friend and colleague (15). His faithfulness and love for this people group deeply resonates the chords of the Gospel.

Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions: A Guide for Christians is not a scholarly work meant to encompass the entirety of the Islamic religion. Rather, it would be best understood as a Christian commentary on the Hadith. This book is filled with twenty one very short (but very helpful) chapters that summarize Islam. The author's

writing style is simple; he introduces each chapter with a short story or summary of the topic, quotes several passages from the Hadith, and adds clear-cut commentary along the way. Additionally, the author does an excellent job in creating bridges to sharing the Gospel with Muslims. Provided in the end of most chapters, his bridges provide helpful insight in knowing what to discuss with a Muslim and what to leave alone. For example, concerning Muhammad, the author cautions his reader:

“We should avoid any type of attack on the character of the Prophet” (50). And, “these are extremely sensitive areas. Walk carefully and humbly!” (50). However, when discussing the differences between heaven and paradise, he exhorts his readers to take advantage of the “natural opening for dialogue” and “focus from the specifics of what is to be found in heaven to the more important issue of how one gains assurance of entry into such a blessed abode” (148). The author did an outstanding job in presenting a clear and analytical display of Islam. Nevertheless, Parshall does have several flaws in his book. To begin, Phil Parshall does not exhort his readers to define the difference between Christians and Americans to their Muslim friends. Rather, he adds confusion to the issue. In chapter sixteen, Parshall rightly warns that “we, as Christians should be careful in sharing our concerns about the treatment of Muslim women by not coming across with a “sense of smug superiority” (180). But then he immediately adds this sentence:

“Our own inadequacies are all too apparent in movies, books, and magazines that degrade women” (180). Who is Parshall referring to here? Drawing from his reference to the Constitutional Amendment of 1920, he seems to be categorizing the United States as a Christian nation (166). Just because the Islamic world may view the United States as a Christian nation it is not. This is a particular issue all Christians must be persistent in making with Muslim friends. If Christianity fails to make this distinction clear, it risks degrading the name of Jesus Christ by associating the church with the secular world. Second, in his eagerness to be objective and fair to Islam, Parshall comes across as apologizing for Christianity when he questions his own understanding of the Bible. For example: when he writes about the difficult topic of jihad and Islamic violence, he begins by listing the Hadiths that mandate Muslims to expand their religion by means of force (103). He properly comments on those passages and provides a praise-worthy analysis of them. Yet, he concludes the chapter by injecting the following comments:

“Am I a pacifist? I struggle to give an answer” (111). “Admittedly, I struggle the most with Old Testament passages” (112). Finally, he advocates the New Testament as being about “love and

forgivenessâ€” whereas the Old Testament was about aggression and retributionâ€” (112). With this, Phil Parshall implies that the testaments are inconsistent with each other. His logic advocates for the effectiveness of the New Testamentâ€”not the Old. Though there may be difficult Bible passages, the author would have done well to exhort his readers to trust in the never changing character of the just, holy, and merciful God of the Bible. To reiterate, there is no wrong in presenting his presuppositions (he is a humble Christian after all), but not at the expense of confusing his readers and coming across as apologizing for Scripture. The author ought to have left his own theological confusions out of the book. Finally, the author failed to point his readers to the changing power of the cross. Consider the following statement from the chapter on women: â€œHow I long for the Islamic scholars to find a better way to exegete their holy books in such a way as to better provide respect and care for over half of their constituencyâ€” (emphasis mine) (180). Why put the emphasis on Islam instead of on Christ? Why does the author long for Islamic scholars to soften the meaning of their Hadiths? He ought to have stated his longing for the power of the Gospel to radically change the Islamic world. In this conclusion, the author failed to emphasize the only thing that could liberate Muslim women from oppression: Christ. A different interpretation of Islam doctrine would not save men and women from the grip of hell. At best, it would only place a band aid on the issue.

Conclusion Despite the small handful of shortcomings, I would not hesitate to recommend this book to other Christians. *Understanding Muslim Teachings and Traditions: A Guide for Christians*, by Phil Parshall proves to be an essential tool every Christian must read. His zeal is convicting. His passion is addicting. His understanding of Islamic culture is spot-on. Though there are a small number of points in which the book could have been perfected, his work stands as one of the most faithfully written Christian books on Islam. This book has been a huge encouragement to me as I have developed a deeper understanding of the Muslim culture and learned how to best evangelize to this people group. Together with the author, may we join his prayer that Muslims would be introduced to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (224).

This book is difficult and hard to read. I expected something more easy to read and understand. Since I bought it used, I'm glad I didn't put a lot of money into it. I will be donating it to my favorite used book store or thrift shop.

Unknown, even to many Muslims, it is vitally important to understand the collected assertions of Muhammad (Hadith) and how they influence the world's Muslims. *Understanding Muslim Teaching*

and Traditions encapsulates this gargantuan collection and places its most important tenets in our hands. Two-hundred twenty-four pages in length followed by a brief glossary and bibliography, the book is written to inform a Christian witness to Muslims and will also advance the cause of lawmakers, peace officers, and military intelligence personnel as they seek to respectfully engage Muslims.

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