

Hating for Jesus Draws Controversy

THE AUTHOR'S 1999 BOOK HATING FOR JESUS TELLS READERS TO TAKE A MORE LITERAL APPROACH TO LUKE 14:26

A small ministry based in the Seattle area that advocates a practice known as "hating for Jesus" has raised concerns among pastors in other parts of the country who say the group is cultic.

Known as Sound Doctrine, the group is led by Timothy Williams, a self-styled Bible teacher who wrote a 1999 book titled Hating for Jesus. He bases his teachings on a literal interpretation of Luke 14:26: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his

own life also, he cannot be My disciple" (NKJV).

Incorporated as a tax-exempt ministry, Sound Doctrine functions as a church and meets in a house in Enumclaw, Wash. Williams moved from Aurora, Colo., to Enumclaw with his wife and children in September 1999. His group claims about 30 members locally but numerous others via the Internet.

The Williamses moved to Enumclaw at the invitation of Chuck and Athena Dean, formerly co-owners of WinePress Publishing, the company that published Hating for Jesus in January 1999—with a print run of 5,000 copies. Negative feedback prompted WinePress to change the title and revise the book by removing two chapters of Williams' controversial doctrines,

said Athena Dean, WinePress' current publisher. The new edition, *The Essential Piece: Living Out Luke 14:26 in Everyday Life*, is slated to release this month.

"So many people are criticizing [the original version] as 'hate material,' when it's simply about denying yourself and embracing the offense of the cross," Athena Dean said. The WinePress catalog describes *Hating for Jesus* in a single paragraph, stating that it "helps to prioritize a relationship with Jesus Christ over personal relationships."

The Essential Piece's editorial content remains largely the same as that of *Hating for Jesus*, except for the deletion of the last two chapters. A chapter called "101 Ways to Deny Self" contained several controversial statements, such as "Deny your health so that you might waste away for the gospel"; "deny your marriage so that you might live only for Him"; and "deny women in leadership so that you might be of God."

Referring to women in leadership, Williams maintains that "because of the fall, women were listened to, and they want to be worshipped. Adam 'listened' to his wife once, and we husbands continue to do the same thing to this day. This is one reason, out of many, why women are not permitted by God to be preachers or to have authority over a man."

The typical interpretation of Luke 14:26 suggests that Jesus called His followers to place their spiritual commitment on a higher level than all other earthly relationships. But Williams says Jesus' words justify hating people in order to demonstrate true disci

pleship.

Said Williams: "We know when Jesus said we must hate that He did not mean 'by comparison.' Such definitions make no sense. Just try a comparison love with your wife. Tell her that compared to other women she is the one you love more. Try telling her that she has the majority of your love."

Responding to accusations that his teaching is divisive, Williams said:

"I always laugh when someone says, 'That group is a cult because they divide families.' If you do not long for division and want to be the source of are not even ready to become a disciple, let alone to be called a 'Christian.' "

Williams dedicated Hating for Jesus to "those willing to embrace a Christianity with a curse." The Sound Doctrine Web site states that "the only reason a Christian church is not labeled a 'cult,' is because it doesn't live enough Christianity to be of Christ."

Williams, who is not licensed or ordained through any denomination or church network, says he has been in full-time ministry for more than 20 years, and he defends his lack of accountability. "He who walks in the light of the cross is far more accountable than he who joins some organization for accountability," he said.

The controversy over Hating for Jesus has been felt as far away as Michigan and North Carolina. At Manna Church in Fayetteville, N.C., pastor Michael Fletcher learned last fall that at least 30 of his church members were reading the book, and three of them went to another North Carolina city to hear Timothy Williams teach.

After these church members were influenced by Hating for Jesus, Fletcher said, they accused him of not being a true Christian. "They told me that Jesus had spoken to them and told them I was not saved," Fletcher said.

"The level of deception is amazing," Fletcher said of Sound Doctrine. "You wouldn't believe the anger." Fletcher later met with those who had been influenced by the book, and he documented how it promotes deception. Most of the people stopped following Williams' teaching, he said.

Williams' book denies Christ's finished work of grace, Fletcher believes. In one chapter, Williams writes: "You have no hope of salvation in your life without the daily pain of the cross. Yet, the false teachers tell us it was all finished when Jesus died on the cross."

Chuck Dean said Sound Doctrine ruined his marriage when Athena Dean divorced him recently due to what he called "differences in religious philosophies" triggered by Williams' teachings. Athena, who remains a member of Sound Doctrine and retains control of WinePress, disputes Chuck's claims and says she divorced him because of his sinful habit patterns.