

# How Christians Are Manipulated By Untethered Empathy with Pastor Joe Rigney

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## HOST: DAVID WHEATON:

How Christians are manipulated by untethered empathy. That is the topic we'll discuss today in The Christian Worldview Radio program, where the mission is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. I'm David Wheaton, the host. The Christian Worldview is a non-profit listener-supported radio ministry. Our website is [TheChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org), and the rest of our contact information will be given throughout today's program. As always, thank you for your notes of encouragement, financial support in lifting us up in prayer.

Have you ever wondered why so many feminists support biological boys who identify as girls being able to compete against and defeat biological girls in girls' sporting events? Or why is nary a peep uttered by those on the left against Somali Muslim immigrants in Minnesota, who defrauded taxpayers of over \$9 billion? But in the next second, these same people are out on the streets screaming and interfering with immigration and customs enforcement agents, ICE agents, who are tasked with finding and deporting illegal immigrants, many of whom have committed additional crimes while in the country.

The animating motivation behind these scenarios and countless more is a misguided form of empathy. Empathy means the ability to understand and share the feelings of another. It has some crossover with sympathy and compassion, which are biblical qualities. God is compassionate. Christ understands and sympathizes with our weaknesses and sufferings and believers are to be like him.

Hebrews 4:15 confirms this, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are yet without sin." Or Colossians 3:12 and 13 extols that, "Believers show compassion as those who have been chosen of God believers, holy and beloved put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience bearing with one another and forgiving each other. Whoever has a complaint against anyone, just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you."

So while sympathy and compassion are biblical virtues, there is a corrupted form of empathy today which serves as a sacred virtue of the left, that is blind to moral truth and negative consequences because the object of their empathy holds an idolized status of being oppressed. Going back to those aforementioned examples, girls missing opportunities in sports or getting injured or defeated by biological boys is ignored, for the greater good of helping the purportedly oppressed trans community feel accepted. It's more important to be welcoming to our Somali Muslim neighbors than to worry about billions in taxpayer fraud. The illegal immigrants in the shadows among us need protection at all costs, never mind that they broke the law to enter

the country. Many have committed serious crimes while here, all the while taking advantage of our taxpayer-funded social services like welfare, education, and healthcare.

Our guest this weekend is Joe Rigney. He's the author of *Leadership and The Sin of Empathy* and he's also the associate pastor of Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. He'll explain how what he calls untethered empathy goes far beyond the biblical call for compassion, and instead is used to manipulate people into supporting leftist policies and power. Because how cold, bigoted, hateful, racist, and homophobic must you be to not share in their so-called empathy? When you begin to see this emotional blackmail taking place in our society, in the church, you will see how important it is for Christians and pastors to speak clearly and boldly with biblical truth and grace. During the program today, we'll also tell you how you can order a copy of Joe Rigney's book, *The Sin of Empathy*, for a donation of any amount to the Christian Worldview. Let's get straight to the interview with Joe Rigney.

Joe, thank you for coming on The Christian Worldview Radio program today. Just tell us briefly about your background, why and how you became a follower of Christ and what you do now.

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

I was born and raised in West Texas and spent about 23 years in Texas as a whole. So I grew up my whole life in West Texas, Midland, became a Christian at First Baptist Church in Midland, really just a standard story. Somewhat of a nominal Christian home, and then my parents got more serious in their faith. The one time I was sitting in a service and we had altar calls and I told my mom, "I think I need to go down and do that," by about 12. That's when I went down and made a profession. I was actually baptized with my dad, so that was pretty special. Then I went to Texas A&M for my undergraduate, spent four years there. That's where I met my wife. While I was in college, is when I was exposed to the ministry of John Piper, a pastor in Minnesota.

I wanted to go to seminary and they had a small ministerial training program. So after college, my wife and I got married and moved straight north right up Highway 35. I spent the next 18 years in the Twin Cities. I went to Seminary. Then I began to teach at Bethlehem College in the Seminary in downtown Minneapolis. Did that for probably 15 years, teaching mainly in our college but also in our seminary. Then the last two years I was there, I was the president of Bethlehem College and Seminary. About three years ago, we decided to move from Minnesota out to Moscow, Idaho. I took a position here as a professor of theology at New St. Andrews and I'm now a pastor at Christchurch. Had three lifetimes now. One in Texas, one in Minnesota, and this most recent one now here in Idaho.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

That's really part of the reason I wanted to have you on the program, is just to talk about your book, *Leadership and The Sin of Empathy*, which we're going to get into today to help people understand the dynamic that's taking place in our society, but also have you apply it to what your experience was here in Minnesota for those 18 years. Just one quick follow-up question that I'm curious about your background. You were here in Minnesota, Minneapolis with John Piper, Bethlehem Baptist, and the associated institutions he was leading, and then you went out to Moscow, Idaho with the institutions that Doug Wilson is leading. These two men would definitely agree on the gospel, but they have much different stances or positions, let's say, on

societal engagement. Probably eschatology and so forth. Did something change in you or what went into that transition?

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

So yeah, you're right that they are very different. In fact, one of the things ... Probably around 2012 or so, there was a series of interviews that I did with ... John Piper and Doug Wilson are two of my heroes. So Piper had dug out for a conference, and so we did an extended interview comparing and contrasting their approach to wider cultural political ministry, things like that. So this has been a very important question to me because I've appreciated both. They both influenced me in deep and profound ways. I would say that the big thing is I was attempting to wed Piper's Christian hedonism supremacy of God in all things with Wilson's build and fight vision for culture, Christian worldview, Christian culture. As that matured over the last decade really, I found myself increasingly out of step with John and with some others at Bethlehem on those kind of questions.

And in particular it was ... You might call it political philosophy. Should we be trying to renew or rebuild Christendom? Is that a good project for Christians? And I think John would say, "No, that's not what we're doing." We seeking to spread the gospel, for sure. But Christendom as a cultural and political project may a byproduct that may or may not happen. But that's not what Christians should be attempting to do. Whereas I think that it is, I think it's part of the great commission, is in discipling the nations and teaching them to observe all that God has commanded. That extends to every area of life and that the fruit of it, the result of it, if God's faithful and kind, is a Christian culture. Christian nations, Christian culture. So I am aiming at that self-consciously as we spread the gospel.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Oh, that's another radio topic right there. So maybe we can have you on for that one at some point coming up. But today we're going to talk about how Christians are manipulated by what you call in your book, *Untethered Empathy*. I just want to start out with a quote from your book. You say, "The idea that pity and compassion could ever be sinful, could ever be inappropriate and wrong, is almost blasphemous in the modern world". As a result, the modern world has sought to give compassion and upgrade to improve it and make it more loving. Enter empathy. Your book, *The Sin of Empathy*, is about that shift, the shift from compassion to empathy and how it wreaks havoc on families, churches, relationships, and society. So you spent the opening chapter defining this term, this concept of empathy, because it's confusing. How is empathy different than sympathy and different things like that? So let's just start with a couple definitions. Talk about this rise of the perversion of empathy, I think is what you're describing in the book, and then how it compares and contrasts with biblical compassion or what we think of as sympathy.

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

Sympathy and compassion are the older terms for that disposition to share people's suffering, to identify with and in some degree, share other people's sufferings and then to relieve their sufferings. That's the word in the Bible. Sympathy, pity, compassion, those are all there. Empathy is a recent word. It shows up in the early 20th century, not prominent until the mid to late sixties and seventies. And then over the last 40 years or so, it's really skyrocketed. It's often presented as an improvement. So you say, "Well, how did it improve?" Well, I

think that sympathy means something like to suffer with someone. Literally what the word means, it's to join them in their sufferings, but you're still you and they're still them. Sympathy is oriented toward their good, like what would be good for them. I think the improvement that people have sought to do with empathy is basically a more total identification with other people's emotions, feelings and pain.

The risk that gets run when you do that is you lose touch with reality. This is what I mean by untethered empathy. When I talk about that, it's untethered from what's true and what's good, and other people's feelings become the lodestar. It's the guiding light. The illustration I use in the book is if you have someone who's drowning in water, apathy, which we all know is bad, is indifference, carelessness, "I don't care about that and I just walk away," and let you drown. Nobody wants that.

My argument is that empathy is basically someone who jumps in with both feet and now you have two people stuck. They lose touch with the shore. Whereas biblical compassion, biblical sympathy, does get in there with them. You put one foot in, you grab onto them, but you keep one foot on the shore so you can brace. So you grab a branch on the side so that you can help pull them out. I think that's the difference. Some people obviously use these terms interchangeably, and I'm not mainly interested in fighting people about what word they want to call it. I'm interested in this idea that empathy, when other people's emotions take over, and we follow where they want to lead, we can go to some very harmful and destructive places, and we can be easily manipulated by our soft heartedness.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Okay, very good. Now, let's apply that to what society is experiencing right now. Because I think once people see how this untethered empathy really is one of the underlying motivations, at least behind all of the leftism, let's say the political and theological liberalism that's going on, they won't be able to unsee it after they see it. So let me just read a short quote from your chapter in the book, *Life Under the Progressive Gaze*, and that's G-A-Z-E. One of my basic contentions you write is that, "A common denominator in the conflicts surrounding all things woke is untethered empathy." So give us some examples, Joe, in our society where non-believing society or even the Christian realm, are misled or misguided in untethered empathy. Lots of different issues this applies to.

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

Even if you're skeptical of what I've said thus far, this one I think will resonate. One of the things that untethered empathy does is it becomes very myopic because we're finite creatures and so we identify with the suffering of some people and not others. It's one of the reasons actually when social scientists do surveys and study this stuff, people who are very high in empathy are often very tribal. Those actually go together because they so identify with suffering of certain people, that they can be very hateful towards their perceived enemies, so it becomes myopic. Here's an example of how it becomes myopic. When it comes to the abortion issue, empathy for a vulnerable woman, at the extreme, you could say a woman who was raped, or just someone who's in hard circumstances, she doesn't have the ability to provide for a child, she's going to be put forward as an object of empathy.

You should feel bad for her and therefore what do you lose sight of? The humanity of her unborn child? We can justify abortion in the name of compassion or empathy because we're so focused on the suffering of one person that we forget there's another person involved. This is actually, I think how the left will frequently make appeals. If you oppose abortion, you must hate women. You must want women to be oppressed. It's like, "No, no, no. We just want unborn children to be protected. We want their rights and their good to be considered in these very difficult situations." So it's not wrong to have compassion for say, a woman who's been raped. That's absolutely what you should have. But does your compassion swallow up your reason and your morality so that you can now take it out on an innocent party who can be discarded in the name of compassion?

That'd be one example. I think one that's maybe a little bit more in the news lately is the issue of immigration. When it comes to immigration, the left has said basically, empathy means you're not allowed to have a border. In fact, there's an interesting story about this. After my book came out a year or so ago, I got a text from a friend who was in Mexico and they were on the Mexico side of the border. And written on the border wall in big block graffiti letters was the word, empathy. It's interesting to think about what that person was saying, whoever wrote that on that wall. Because the idea seems to be that empathy means this border wall, this boundary, is an offense to empathy. It's not empathetic to have this border. And so here's people who are suffering, hurting, want a better life.

That means you have to let them in. If they get here illegally, compassion means you don't require them to go back, but you give them citizenship, you let them come in. If you think, "No, no, we need to have laws, we should have order, and there's an immigration process and they need to go the right way," what are you going to be accused of? Well, you're being heartless, you're not being empathetic. So that's the way that this concept is used as a tool of manipulation to keep you from standing on biblical truth, on reality, but instead, allow your compassion to overwhelm your reason and overwhelm your sense of what's right and wrong and go along with the left's agenda.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Very well stated with examples there. And there's other ones too with regard to homosexuality, the trans movement. I'm sure you'll get into some of these. Race is another one. Sex with feminism.

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

Yes.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Now, there's lots of things that are motivating forces in our society that have worked against, one of the reasons that you moved out to Idaho, to push back against the secularism and the anti-Christian move of our society. Things like just man has a general rebellion against God. Whatever God established, unregenerate man goes against it. Man's default position is another one, just to build Babel. A world without God even moves toward ... I think communism is the default position of man.

Another motivation that people have in going against God in a Christian society is a works' righteousness that they think they can establish their own society better than God would. The virtue signaling, the Phariseism that comes. So compare some of these common motivations for why people don't want a Christian-aligned society. Where would you rank the motivation of this empathy, this misguided or untethered empathy in there?

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

I think it's basically the tool that secularists in particular have used to hijack a Christian society. Why does it work? Well, it's because we live in the ruins of Christendom. We're a society that's been deeply shaped by the scriptures, by the Christian faith for millennia, which means that we've been taught rightly that we should be compassionate and kind and tender-hearted, that we should show compassion the way that Christ showed compassion to us. So God's compassion, God's mercy, is a model. What begins to happen though, and this is something I learned from C.S. Lewis, who said that pity or empathy, whatever word you want to use, that disposition helped. Pity was supposed to be a spur, a little prompt, that helps the joyful to help the miserable. You're in a good position, they're in a hard position. Pity is the little spur. That's why Jesus was moved with compassion because the crowds were like sheep without a shepherd.

But then Lewis says, "But it can be used the wrong way around because it can be used as a emotional blackmail." You can hold joy up to hostage by pity. Anybody who's ever been on the receiving end of a pity party knows what I'm talking about. When someone puts on a long face, exaggerates their suffering, "Woe is me." And why do they do this? Because they want to get you to do what they want you to do, and if you give into that, that's what I'm calling the sin of empathy, you're giving in ... Maybe you're doing something for them that you don't think is actually wise or good, it's not going to help them. But their sadness overwhelms your better judgment. You're so focused on their immediate feelings that you lose sight of their long-term good. That's something I think that can only happen in a Christian society, because it's a Christian society that has really internalized the importance of compassion.

One of this is, again, something I learned from Lewis. It's the best things that become the worst things when they go wrong. So because compassion is such a great virtue, it's why the devil targets it to twist it and corrupt it and put forward this counterfeit form of compassion that actually enables evil, that enables falsehood. You will go so far as even lie. It's amazing. You'll lie. Well, what's the trans movement's tool? Here's someone who's confused. Here's someone who's been born in the wrong body. Don't you feel bad for them? Therefore, you need to accommodate their insanity. If it's a man and he thinks he's a woman, you need to call him a her, or you need to make up whatever words they want to use. They, them, whatever other pronouns. Why would you do that? Because you want to be kind.

You want to be compassionate, you want to be empathetic and if you refuse, if you say, "No, I'm going to stand on the truth. That's a man and not a woman, and so I'm going to say he and not she," what will you be accused of? You will be accused of being unempathetic, of being heartless and callous. This is how it works on Christians. We want to not only be compassionate, we also want to be known as compassionate. Our reputation. I think this is where the left has really discovered the one two punch of if they can define empathy

and compassion according to their definitions, and then this next step is they can accuse you of not having it unless you go along, then they've got you because you don't want to be called a bigot, you don't want to be called a hater, you don't want to be called callous and heartless, so you'll mute yourself as a Christian. You'll mute yourself, you'll go along with it. Because you think I want to be known as a compassionate person, but you're not using the Bible's definition of compassion. You've now adopted this progressive leftist worldly definition and you're being steered by it.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

I think you just answered my next two questions for you regarding why this is so effective with Christian institutions. Academia, parachurch organizations, churches, they easily imbibe this misguided or untethered empathy because the highest virtue is to be kind or be nice so they never want to be considered not that. The question though is how to explain why Christian leaders or institutions so quickly resist, "being political"? They won't give into this. We don't want to take one side or the other here. Let's say an issue like immigration here, this whole thing in Minnesota that was taking place with the ICE enforcement and so forth. But then they're very quick sometimes to take up leftist causes. The anti-ICE protests for one, is an obvious one, or Black Lives Matter back in 2020 after the death of George Floyd, or opposing for sure things that Trump does, but when the left does something egregiously, unbiblical or non-Christian, they don't always say much about it. Talk about that dynamic and how the empathy really affects the way Christian leaders operate.

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

If you walk down the street and you ask people which of the political parties or political movements in our country is most associated with this word, what would they say? If you walked down and you said, "Which a political party is associated with law and order," I think most people would say, "Well, that's conservatives, that's a conservative word. That's the Republicans." And if you said, "Okay, which political party is more compassionate?" I think most people would intuitively say, "Well, the left is compassionate," because that's what they talk about. But the reality is that they're not. Because the result of "leftist compassion" is the lawlessness that we see in our streets. I remember when the young woman last fall in North Carolina who was killed on the bus. I would say one of the things that killed her was empathy. How's that possible? Well, that guy had been in and out of prison. He'd been arrested so many different times, 12 to 14 times, something like that.

He had been repeatedly released. What would be the motive? Why would they be releasing him? What would they say? Why would they release this guy? It's like, "Well, we want to be compassionate on this man who's had a hard life and has issues. We're going to let him out." It's compassion, it's humanitarianism, it's kindness that leads us to let the criminal free. Because of that, he's free to commit another crime and this young woman is dead as a result. But I think if Christians allow the left to have the market on compassion, Christians have a deep sense of the world is watching. "We want people to believe the gospel. We want people to trust in Christ." And so we have this idea that the world is watching us. But when we think about who the world is, we inevitably think of it as a progressive world, and that's who we're trying to win over.

So how do we do that? Well, we have to communicate to them that we care about the things that they care about. So if it's a progressive cause, then we will try to demonstrate, "Hey, hey, we actually care about that too." Whether it's amnesty for illegal immigrants, whether it's feminism, whether it's climate change, you pick the topic. We want to show to the world we care about what you care about, because we want to win them. And then on the other hand, one of the ways that you can win people over you can be winsome is you can share their enmities, you can share their hostilities. And so then Christians try to ingratiate themselves with the left by differentiating themselves from other Christians. "We're not like those Christians. We're not like the Trump supporting Christians. We're not like the MAGA Christians. We're different from them."

So this is where winsomeness ... Another fun word. "And we want to be winsome." Again, we do. But winsomeness can often become pleasomeness. Rather than trying to win people, we try to please them. Pleasing man, according to the Bible, is a sin. Paul says, "If I'm trying to please man, I can't be a servant of Christ." You have to choose. You're going to please man or please God. You have empathy, desire for approval, desire for a certain kind of reputation. It's that mix that then gets leveraged against Christian leaders who are then pressured to speak up about certain social issues, Black Lives Matter, and pressured to keep quiet about other social issues. Don't support Trump's immigration enforcement. It always tips that way. That's the common thread and it demonstrates that we're often steered by our reputations and by our empathy.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

You are giving us a lot to think about here, Joe. You have a chapter in the book on feminism and you title The Queen of the Woke. You say untethered empathy, as you've been describing here, "In tandem with a desire for respectability and credibility under the progressive gaze, is the means by which various aggrieved groups have been able to steer communities into catering to greater and greater folly and injustice. And a key ingredient in making this steering effective is feminism." Two-part question here. How does this sin of empathy play out with the fact that our society has become much more feminized? And why is it that it seems like even just watching these ICE protests in Minneapolis, that it seems like so many women, particularly white women, are on the front lines of this misguided empathy?

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

Let's start with how God made us. God made men and women different and those differences are good. It was a good idea that God did this. And one of the ways he made us different is women, generally speaking, are more empathetic, compassionate, nurturing than men. Men excel at certain things, building things, mathematics and rational sort of stuff like that. Men are engineering, things like that. Men excel, their minds work that way. God made women to be mothers and therefore, they have that nurturing, caring, compassionate intuition and instinct. This again, is a good thing but like most good things, it's good in its place. If you take it out of where it belongs and you put it someplace else, it typically will go wrong. So before thinking about the political, think about the church, this is one of the reasons I think that God restricts the pastoral office to qualified men, because men have the job of the pastor.

It's not that he's just the only one to care for people. All Christians should care and love one another and serve one another. What does the pastor do? Well, he has to guard the doctrine of the church. He has to

guard the worship. He has to set boundaries and enforce them for the church. God has designed men to be able to do that. Whereas women, they're the ones who bring the warmth and the life and the hospitality and the welcoming. Okay, but what happens if you put the welcoming in the place where you need the guardian? The answer is you're going to let in all kinds of error. You're going to let in all kinds of falsehoods, especially if it's couched in the form of victimhood. I think in our society, part of what's happened is we've elevated victimhood and that's part of what the whole woke movement was all about, was there's oppressors and there's oppressed, and you need to sort people into one category or the other.

The more oppressed categories you belong to, the greater your score is. I think for white women in particular, if you think about the hierarchy that the woke set up, at the top was the straight white male. He's the most oppressive there is. But underneath him is white women. And white women don't want to be thought of as oppressors. They don't like being in that. They don't want to be thought of as the bully and the oppressive person. Then you'd work down and you'd have African-Americans. So there'd be racial thing, sexual minorities, LGBTQ. And at the bottom, the most oppressed. And then therefore when you flip the hierarchy, the greatest victim wins. That's where trans actually comes into play. They're the most oppressed of the oppressed. So what happens then is that for white women in particular, they don't want to be in the oppressor category.

So they go to great lengths to prove that they're not. They become allies and advocates on behalf of all of the oppressed groups. What's motivating them is a corrupt mothering instinct. Here's these oppressed groups. In the case of the present day, here's illegal immigrants who are scared and frightened by immigration and enforcement. The women who are out on the front lines harassing ICE agents, they're like Mama bears. We talk about the proverbial the mama bear who protects her cubs. But now, because it's been corrupted and twisted, it's not protect her own children. In this case, I've actually seen videos of women bringing their children to these things, wearing them, and effectively using their children as human shields. The ICE agent hopefully won't do anything to me, won't beat me up, because I have a child on my chest.

So it's using her own child as a human shield to protect, in this case, it's just bizarre, illegal immigrants who've committed crimes like rape and murder and aggravated assault. That's who ICE is going after. That's the priority. So it's this corruption of that motherhood, empathy, nurturing instinct. When you've wondered why is it that women are advocating for trans stuff, which puts men in women's spaces. How did Bruno end up in the women's locker room showering with your daughter? It was women that let him in. Why? Because he's so oppressed and he's so hurt, and he's so sad about his gender identity, that we're going to do everything we can to make him feel better. If he says he needs to be in the women's locker room, then by golly, we'll let him in.

So again, it's this corruption of a woman's empathetic instinct and her desire to be thought well of, to not be thought of as an oppressor. I think that's behind a lot of why the trans stuff ... Again, if you're at the top of the victimhood oppression hierarchy, if you're the worst of the worst, well how do you flip the script? You go trans. If you're a white male, just become a trans female. All of a sudden, now you're the greatest victim, and the greatest victim wins.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Very interesting. I hope listeners are beginning to understand this dynamic and how it works in society. It really explains so much about what motivates those on the left. Because you'll be reading your friend's social media post who professes to be a Christian, trying to figure out how on earth he or she can be vehemently anti-ICE or pro-Black Lives Matter, or forgiving amnesty to illegal immigrants. This is untethered empathy, ignore biblical truth and sinful consequences, all because the object of empathy is deemed oppressed.

Joe, I just want to ask you one question about what has taken place in Minnesota because you lived here for 18 years. All of the country world has been watching what has been going on here with the George Floyd death in the hands of the Minneapolis police officers, the riots that followed.

Then just more recently when federal ICE agents came here to enforce immigration law, people who had broken the law enter our country, particularly as you mentioned, those who are criminals to try to remove them. The pushback and the protests and the interference of that was just unbelievable going on in this city. So my question is, as a former Minnesotan, how do you view what's taken place in this state? This is what people I think are wondering. What's in the water in Minnesota or whatever? Why is the dynamic the way it is here in Minnesota to lead us to these incidents that we've seen?

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

The high trust society, deeply, Christian, historic Lutherans, who wanted to be welcoming and kind to everyone, but lacked the antibodies necessary to realize that if you let everybody in, they'll eventually take advantage of your hospitality. When we talk about Minnesota nice, I think that that's a big part of it, is that, "We don't want to give offense, we don't want to give offense, we don't want to give offense." I think that's in the air. At the same time, I think the other thing that's in play is that the left has a strategy for gaining political power. That involves three things. Step one is government spending on empathetic programs, compassionate programs, to help those who need help of all kinds. Education and healthcare and all that kind of stuff. But what it's turned into is basically a large slush fund through which they funnel money to their electoral clients.

Basically, people who support them get the money. So we think about the Somali healthcare scams, welfare scams that have hit the news last December, I think that's a big part of it. The second thing is mass immigration. If you don't have enough voters in this country who support your agenda, what can you do? You can import new ones, bring new people in and get them hooked up to all that slush fund, which is what has happened with the Somalis. And if you do that, now you've got a new client group who will throw elections for you. Then the third step is lax election laws. Why do they oppose the use of ID? It seems like a very common sense thing. People should have to prove who they are in order to vote. It seems like everybody of all political parties would want that. But for whatever reason, the left says, "No, no, no, we don't want to have any ID necessary."

Instead in Minnesota, I know this is the case, if you live in a precinct and you can prove it, you can come down on election day and you can vouch for eight other people who don't have proof that they live in that district,

and you can say, "No, no, they're here legally, they don't have ID. But they're here legally and you can vouch for them." If you do, they get to cast a vote. Well, that's an absolutely insane way to conduct elections, especially in a country that now has millions of illegal immigrants in it. That combination that basically if the left can achieve that, if they can have large welfare state funneling money to electoral clients with lax voting laws, they have a path to permanent power. And I think what started to happen over the last year, as the Trump administration came online, is they posed a threat to that.

They're exposing the fraud, Doge and other things. Then citizen journalists like that young guy, Nick Shirley, who went and found that there's no kids at any of these daycares. Those kinds of things expose the racket. So the left's intensity to stop it and to take the focus and instead put it on how terrible ICE is, how terrible immigration enforcement, is a distraction strategy from exposure of their path to political power. And I think Minnesota is a good example of a state where the left is almost at the tipping point. It's not there yet. Elections are still competitive. They're not California, they're not Illinois, they're not New York. But the left wants to turn Minnesota into that kind of place, where they don't even have to try anymore because they've chased enough conservatives out of the state, and they have a stranglehold through those three elements that they can simply impose their agenda.

I think for Christians, especially Christians who care about say abortion or the sexual immorality and ethics kind of stuff, the gay marriage or the trans stuff, "We don't want boys playing in girls sports," and things like that, if you care about those issues, you ought to care about these other issues, the government spending and the waste and the fraud, the immigration. Because if they can achieve political power through that means, then what are they going to do? What's the next thing they're going to do? They're going to fund abortions for everybody. They're going to teach trans in the schools. All of those other things that you do oppose will be the fruit if you don't resist on these other issues. So I think it's important for Christians to have courage and to encourage other Christians to not allow the left's agenda to take effect. I think it's very destructive and you don't want to get hijacked by your empathy.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

What do you think that looks like, living in Minnesota, as someone who doesn't share any of these left wing viewpoints that are being pushed on everyone right now? What do you recommend Christians and churches who live in hard left places like Minneapolis, other cities and states that are more like here? What do you do? Because we just feel outnumbered, out-threatened by the way. You go down to one of the ICE protests with your family, you're putting your family at risk. What do you recommend Christians and churches do in these kinds of areas?

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

I think the first place is to have very frank conversations with other Christians. So I think sometimes, and this is another fruit of it, is because some Christians out of their misguided empathy are supporting or at least tolerating some of the left's antics and so forth, I think if you don't think that, you need to speak up about it. You need to say, "You know what? I actually think that the two deaths that everybody points to of Alex Preti and Rene Good, that's all downstream from Governor Walz and Mayor Frye's refusal to cooperate with

immigration enforcement. That blood's on their hands. Because they could have simply done what most other states, like Florida and Texas and Idaho and other states, are cooperating with immigration enforcement. Because, "We want these people gone. They need to go back, they're not here legally. In many cases, they've committed heinous crimes and that's what the Trump administration is trying to move. Don't you want that?"

I think you have to get bold there. And calm. Don't get angry, be sober-minded, be clear, but push back against that Christian tendency to say, "Well, but it's all motivated by compassion." It's not actually. I think compassion is the branding because it's the effective steering wheel, but the actual motive is political power. If you can unmask that and say what they're actually trying to do is maintain the fraud, maintain the pipeline, that's the actual motive. They know that you are a compassionate person and if they can appeal to it, if they can manipulate you by it, then you'll go along. And you shouldn't do that. You shouldn't allow your soft heart to overcome a clear head.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Final question for you, Joe. In the final chapter of your book, it's titled, *In Praise of Compassion*. So as we conclude today, what is your final exhortation to Christians listening as to how to avoid this trap of empathy being drawn into this manipulation that goes on in our society, and instead apply biblical compassion and also truth? You answered this a bit in your last answer. But answer it more fully as to what would be your exhortation in that regard for Christians to exhibit biblical compassion in truth.

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

I wrote that last chapter because I knew if you write a book called *Leadership and The Sin of Empathy*, and you're trying to expose all of the manipulative tricks that people use to co-opt it. People are going to begin to think that you're advocating actually in favor of heartlessness and callousness and indifference. And I'm not. I want biblical compassion. That last chapter explores Christ at the tomb of Lazarus, who loved Mary and Martha and Lazarus, and he wept at the tomb with compassion and shared their sufferings, before raising Lazarus from the dead. So Christ is a model for compassion, and we ought to be compassionate people as well. I don't want the abuse of our compassion, the twisting and corruption of our compassion into untethered empathy, to become an excuse for actual heartlessness. We ought to be soft-hearted. But it's important to get the order right.

First, you need to know what's true and what's good. You need to be anchored to Christ, anchored to reality. Then because you're anchored to Christ, now you can be compassionate. It's when you unhitch from Him and unhitch from reality and unhitch from what's true, that your compassion becomes a threat and a danger, and causes destruction. So that last chapter is basically cling to Jesus for dear life because He is your life. Be like Him. And He was actually more than willing on various occasions to confront sinners in their sinfulness, to call them out, to condemn it. He wasn't nice. He wasn't nice to Pharisees. And if you ask me today, what's the nearest equivalent to a biblical Pharisee today? Well, in the Bible, a Pharisee is a thought leader or an influencer who wrecks their own traditions in order to nullify the word of God, and tries to keep people from entering the kingdom of God and makes people into sons of hell and likes to show a virtue but lacks the substance. That's what a Pharisee is.

You said, "Who is that today?" I said, "I look at the left and I see all of those traits." Do they nullify the word of God, the clear teaching of scripture in favor of their own traditions? Absolutely. Is it hypocritical virtue signaling? We're going to put a show of virtue, but substantively we're going to be hypocrites? Absolutely. Do they travel over land and sea to make converts and then they make them twice the son of hell? Well, is the left propagating sexual ideology that leaves people castrated and mutilated when they follow it? Absolutely. So I think Jesus had very sharp words for that kind of evil that kept people out of the kingdom. I think Christians have that same kind of courage, and then they can have compassion on the refugees, on the collateral damage. They can show real compassion, rather than the fake counterfeit.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

That's so well said, Joe. We just appreciate your thinking deeply and clearly about this issue, this motivating dynamic that takes place in our society. How empathy is used as a manipulative tool to move people, not just politically left, but theologically left as well. So thank you for coming on the Christian Worldview today, for writing this book, and we'd love to have you back on again sometime. But in the meantime, we'd wish you all of God's best and grace.

**GUEST: JOE RIGNEY:**

Thanks, David. Appreciate you having me on.

**HOST: DAVID WHEATON:**

Well, I hope this conversation with Joe Rigney on untethered empathy helped you understand what underpins and motivates many of the sinful policies which mark our nation, from abortion to gender ideology, to race, to welfare, to immigration, to many other issues. How Christians in the church are seduced by it in the desire to be compassionate and not unkind. If you missed any of today's interview, you can hear it again at our website, [TheChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org), or by searching for it in the podcast app on your device. We also have links to Joe Rigney at our website as well.

Christian author, Rosaria Butterfield, says about the book: "Joe Rigney is not against empathy. He does take issue with untethered empathy and emotive connection that exceeds and overpowers reality and good judgment. When empathy is unhitched from the truth, it becomes an idol and a god. And feelings create tyrannical idols and gods." That's exactly what untethered empathy is, an idol and a god. It's a man-made religion of self-righteousness. I'm better than God and those Christians because they won't affirm and accept illegals and homosexuals and trans people. But I do, and therefore, I'm a good person and I'm on the right side of history.

It's remarkable how biblical concepts like compassion and sympathy are twisted for godless ends. Sadly, the discernment of Christians is poor, that they can't fend this kind of thing off and actually join in because it seems like the right thing to do. Because the alternative, what they see on TV or on the internet, mostly white men in masks with guns, forcibly hauling darker skinned people away and pepper spraying or even shooting, protesters who interfere, well, that could never be right according to them.

But this is the epitome of deception when governing authorities are upholding reasonable laws that is seen as evil. So pray with me as we close the program today.

Lord, You are the all-wise God who is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in loving kindness and truth. Your Son is the example of perfect compassion for the suffering, the weak, the lost, and yet, never compromising Your truth in the process. So help us, Lord, as Your word says in 1 Peter Chapter 3, to be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kind-hearted and humble in spirit. Yet, also help us stand firm on the good and right truths You establish for us personally and societally. If there are Christians listening today who have been deceived by untethered empathy, which has caused thinking and living contrary to Your will, Lord, lead them to repentance and restoration. If there are some listening today who need to hear and believe Your truth of salvation, to repent and believe in Your Son as Savior and Lord, call them to Yourself today, Father. Compel them to read Your word in the Gospel of John or visit the webpage What Must I Do To Be Saved at [TheChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org). We love You and trust You. Father, we pray this in the name of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Thank you for joining us today on The Christian Worldview and for your support of this non-profit radio ministry. Until next time, think biblically, live accordingly and stand firm.

Our guest today was Pastor Joe Rigney from Christ Church in Moscow, Idaho. For a limited time, you can order his book, *Leadership and The Sin of Empathy*, subtitled *Compassion and Its Counterfeits*, for a donation of any amount to the Christian Worldview. The book is hardcover, 164 pages, and retails for \$22. To order, just go to our website or call or write us. All our contact information will be given during this break.

The mission of The Christian Worldview is to sharpen the biblical worldview of Christians and to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. We hope today's broadcast encouraged you toward that end. To hear a replay of today's program, order a transcript, or find out what must I do to be saved, go to [TheChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org) or call toll-free 1-888 646-2233. The Christian Worldview is a listener-supported non-profit radio ministry furnished by the Overcomer Foundation. To make a donation, order resources, become a Christian Worldview partner, sign up for our weekly email or *The Christian Worldview Journal* print publication. Or to contact us, go to [TheChristianWorldview.org](http://TheChristianWorldview.org). Call 1-888 646-2233, or write to Box 401, Excelsior, Minnesota, 55331. Thanks for listening to The Christian Worldview.