

What Happened to Our Respect for Authority? With Brett & Erin Kunkle

(August 19, 2025)

FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen, there is an authority crisis in our culture. And you might be sitting there thinking, well, why is that a problem? I want to do what I want to do, and I'm the authority of my own life. Why do I need to bow to authority? Shouldn't I question authority? Shouldn't I express myself and try and do what I want to do to follow my authentic self? And how does this relate to parenting? What should we do as parents? Do parents have an authority over their children? Is that right?

Is that biblical? Is that true? And what happens when that breaks down? What happens to your children? What happens to society when respect for authority wanes? Well, I've got two friends with me who are experts in this area, Brett and Erin Kunkle of Maventruth.com. Brett Kunkle has been with the CrossExamined Instructor Academy. That's a school that we run every year for all 18 years. We're in Charlotte, North Carolina, right now as we record this, our 18th year. Brett, it's always great to have you on.

BRETT:

Yeah, Frank. But I don't know if you have authority to address this topic. [Laughter]

FRANK:

I don't. That's why I have you here. And Erin. And by the way, you guys have a podcast. What do you call the podcast? And what are the topics that you cover as a couple?

BRETT:

Yeah, it is the Maven Parent podcast.



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FRANK:

Okay.

BRETT:

Particularly focusing on helping parents to develop and cultivate a biblical worldview that informs their parenting. And so, we cover everything. We cover everything from how do you deal with a picky eater? And actually, how does your theology or your worldview inform how you even view food?

Because we want biblical truth to drive everything we do, even the details of our parenting to then covering things like, okay, what's a biblical view that we want to pass on to our kids about immigration, or politics, and everything in between?

FRANK:

Now, you're sort of experts in parents because you have like 37 kids, right? [Laughter] How many kids do you have?

BRETT:

Erin knows the exact number. [Laughter]

FRANK:

Does she have all the names down?

BRETT:

Yeah. That's what moms do, right?

ERIN:

I have all the names and the birth dates down. He always looks at me when it's like, wait, what year was that kid born?

BRETT:

I'm aware. I'm vaguely aware of small people running around the house.

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ERIN:

Well, I remember distinctly, when all five. We have five kids are born, because I was there, and I was doing—

FRANK:

You were there.

ERIN:

I was doing a lot of work.

BRETT:

I was there for three.

ERIN:

To get these five kids into the world. No, we have five kids. Our oldest is 30, and then our youngest is 14. So, we have quite a range in the five kids.

BRETT:

Well, and our oldest daughter has three girls of her own. So, you know what that means? I'm married to a grandma.

FRANK:

Okay Grandpa. [Laughter]

BRETT:

Oh, is that? Yeah, that also follows.

ERIN:

He loves the girls and loves when they call him grandpa, but any other context, he really—

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BRETT:

I'm too young to be a grandpa.

ERIN:

You like to think so.

FRANK:

Yeah. There's a running inside joke here at CIA, that Brett here would always call Greg Koukl grandpa, but Brett became a grandpa before Greg did. Greg isn't even a grandpa. [Laughter]

BRETT:

Oh, the irony.

FRANK:

All right, so tell us about this issue of authority. Why is it important, and how has it come on your radar? And how do you deal with it?

BRETT:

Yeah, well, I mean, with the Christian worldview, authority is an absolutely essential, vital piece. God, of course, is the authority over all of us. And primarily, one of the primary ways that that authority is expressed is through His Word. And so, this is why we talk about God's word being authoritative.

Right? And so, we're to submit our lives to this. In addition, in God's design for the family, he has put parents in a position of authority over their children. But what we see in the larger culture over the last number of decades is a slow, steady erosion of authority in the culture. And so, you look-- I mean, just look at the various institutions of the culture. You can look at something like education. And clearly there's a crisis of authority there where we don't trust our educational experts, or teachers, or school boards.

You look at media, obviously there's a crisis of authority there. You look at politics, politicians. I mean the approval ratings on politicians are so low. You look at law enforcement and there's a crisis of authority there. Now, whether or not some of that's justified is another question. But

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clearly, we see this kind of crumbling of respect that's given to these authorities and their authority is not trusted. And clearly you have in the culture, just because these people are in positions of authority, doesn't mean they command the respect of other people.

So, this is the, I think this is important to lay out because this is the context that our kids are growing up in now, which is different than an older generation who there was just the respect for authority that was just kind of built into the culture. But now our kids are soaking in a culture where there's a lack of authority, there's a lack of trust in authority. And so, they import that. They absorb it and then they import it right into their Christian life. And yet, then we're at church on Sunday telling, them, hey. The Bible is God's authoritative word.

You need to listen to it. You need to respect it. And they're sitting there thinking, maybe not even thinking. They've just again, imbibed this from the culture. They don't come with this natural authority. And it's not enough simply for us to say, oh, God's the authority. Oh, parents are the authority. Period. End of story.

FRANK:

Erin, what implications does this kind of waning of authority have for parenting? How does it make it more difficult? What can you do about it?

ERIN:

Well, it's basically spun parenting into chaos is how I would describe it. And it seems to me the biggest way that parents are influenced now is through social media, especially moms.

And so, Instagram, TikTok is some of the biggest ways parents are influenced in how to think about their role as a parent. And this goes for Christian parents too. And so, you have Christian moms who are struggling with a toddler who's throwing fits, for example. And so, because there isn't this well founded foundation of authority in the culture—

So, there's not this, well, if you're having trouble, you talk to your mom, or your grandma, or the older lady at church. Instead, it's, well, if you have trouble, Google it and see what Google has to say about a toddler who's throwing a fit. Well, Google doesn't have wisdom. And so, moms are Googling things or scrolling on Instagram and getting quick little fixes.

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And of course, the sources they're getting this advice from isn't necessarily and probably mostly doesn't have any kind of Christian worldview. For example, the instruction that children are given specifically in Scriptures is number one, that they obey their parents.

This word obedience is out of, how would you say? Out of style now. Like you don't talk about in the culture kids needing to obey their parents. Obedience is like a bad word. And why is that? Well, it's because this crisis of authority along with—

So, when you have all these institutions that crumble, who becomes the authority? Well, I do. I become the authority of myself and of reality. And it's this, you know what Carl Truman and many others talk about expressive individualism. So, now you take that view that's in the culture and now bring it into the home. And so, in our case, all seven people in our home with five kids, if we all value expressive individualism, well that means each one of us is an authority, and no person is higher than the other. And so, the three year old is the authority of the three year old.

And the parent has no right to command or give instructions to even the three year old. You're supposed to as a parent, talk to the 3 year old, find out what they're really feeling inside, validate those feelings, and then base your actions on the feelings of the child. And any kind of, whether it's right or wrong is completely out the window. The authority is the child's feelings, and that's what parents are supposed to go off of.

BRETT:

This undermines ultimately then the kid's view of God because expressive individualism says you go inward, right? The primary authority is you. And then you determine who you are, your identity, all your values and that, and then you express that, and then everyone has to affirm you. So, this undermines the authority of parents.

And when the authority of parents is undermined, God is undermined because the parents often, and I think this is by God's design, they're the first representation of God to the children, and they are to model, right, the proper relationship between an authority and someone under that authority.

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A healthy relationship with mom and dad lays the foundation for a healthy relationship with God. And this is where you see, like in the work of Paul Vitz in his book 'Faith of the Fatherless', you get a broken or absent relationship with the father, some kind of dysfunction, major dysfunction there. And then, people, a lot of atheists, reject the authority of a father figure, right, because of that. And this is just by God's design. So, if you undermine parental authority, ultimately this has a way of undermining God's authority and biblical authority.

And so, this is what we need to think about. This is the context that this next generation is growing up in. And so, we can no longer assume that they hold to some kind of view of the authority of parents, the authority of God, the authority of Scripture. So, we're going to have to do a lot of work, I think, to rebuild it. Because I think there's sometimes an older generation just wants to kind of pound the pulpit and say, well, no, the Bible's God's word. It's an authority, period.

And that's the end of the story. Young people don't go for that anymore because they've had other authorities around them who have said the same thing and then let them down. We're going to have to really work hard, I think, to build authority. And so, I think in terms of biblical authority, I think, you know, there's—

What we want to help young people do, number one is, or I think maybe what we do as the adults, the ones who are discipling and training kids, is we have to first think through the nature of authority, right? Think about, a command. A command is tightly connected to authority. Someone who gives a command, or let's say you hear a command, and this is the illustration I like to use.

You're at a Chinese food restaurant, you open up the fortune cookie and a command pops out and the fortune says, get up and leave now. Do you obey that command? Well, no. Why not? Because it came from a fortune cookie. There's nothing that obligates you to the fortune cookie. Well, what if it's the customer who's sitting next to you and she says, hey, get up and leave now. You're going to say, well, wait a second, who are you? And if she says, oh, I'm just another customer, and you say, well, I don't have to get up and leave. But if that person next to you says, get up and leave now.

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And you go, who are you? And she says, and flashes you a badge and says, I'm a DEA agent. We're going to bust the owner of this restaurant for dealing drugs. You better get up and leave now. Now you leave. What's the difference? I mean, it's actually the same command whether it's the fortune cookie, the customer, or the DEA agent. What's the difference? The difference is the person that stands behind the command, the authority behind the command. And so, what that tells us is that the commands have to be backed up by the proper authority.

And so, again, thinking through the nature of authority, there has to be an appropriate authority behind this. Well, that's key when it comes to God and God's word. God's commands expressed in his word, well, they're backed up by the person behind the book. And so, we need to know who that person is. Are they the proper authority? Yeah, well, we would say yes, right? Because it's God. Well, in this culture, kids don't just give respect and give room for authority in their lives to someone who simply has the, you know, who's purported to be the authority or is like, for instance, law enforcement, police officers.

Well, just because you're a police officer, unfortunately, nowadays a lot of kids aren't going to respect that. And so, how do we build authority? Well, take our relationship. Like, okay, if Erin tells me to do something, I'm gonna do it, right? If a stranger comes—

FRANK:

You better. [Laughter]

BRETT:

Yeah, I better. If a stranger comes up to me and says, hey, I want you to do something, I'm like, well, wait, wait, who are you? What's the difference? Well, the difference is, I don't have a relationship with a stranger.

I've got a relationship with Erin. And so, it's not just the sense of, oh, I'm gonna get in trouble with my wife, but there is a sense of a relationship that then builds trust. And so, when she says something, I kind of don't question it. I just trust her because there's a relationship. However, there's limits to that. If Erin comes at me and says, hey, open your mouth, and she's got dental tools, you know, I'm gonna say, wait, wait, wait, no, no, no. And it doesn't matter how close our relationship is. I'm not gonna let her near my teeth with dental tools because she isn't a dentist.

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Meaning she doesn't have the relevant knowledge. And I think what that illustrates is that authority needs two primary things for us to build that. We need relationship and we need knowledge. And I think that ties right into God's word. Number one, we need to give our young people knowledge of God and knowledge of his word, and particularly, and this is where apologetics is so key. Most of our young people have no knowledge of where the Bible comes from.

They have no knowledge of the historical evidence for Scripture. They have no knowledge of the manuscript evidence for Scripture, let alone the contents of Scripture. So, they're so ignorant of Scripture at every level that there's no knowledge. So, there's no trust there. There's no authority that's given to that. In addition, they have no knowledge of God, the God who we say stands behind this and is the purported authority behind it.

They have no knowledge of him. Just ask any kid, hey, list for me the attributes of God. They'll give you like three or four out of the 20 or so attributes of God. So, they don't really have any knowledge of God. So, if they don't have any knowledge of God and knowledge of His Word, I can pretty much guarantee you they're not going to hold it as an authority. Right? In addition, then they also need a relationship with the word. They need to be reading it. And they're so biblically illiterate that there's no relationship with the word.

FRANK:

Ladies and gentlemen, quickly, I've got three things I want to make you aware of. We're going to Israel October 3rd. Actually, we're going to start in Jordan. We're going to fly to Amman, Jordan, see Petra, and then go into Israel for an entire week. And our guide is going to be the great Ellie Shukron, the archaeologist who discovered the Pool of Siloam and excavated most of the City of David, ancient Israel in David's day. In fact, Ellie's like the mayor there. You walk around there, people going, Ellie, Ellie. He can get into places other people can't get into.

And we're going to be with him. So, if you want to see Israel, go to CrossExamined.org, click on Events. You'll see the trip there. We're going to Jordan first, then Israel, and then if you want, you can come with us for four days to Egypt. It's going to be phenomenal. Go to crossexamined.org and check in on our Israel trip. And if you want to learn a lot more about archaeology, our 'Digging up the Bible' course begins September 8th. I'll be your instructor.

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We've got 22 hours of video, much of it from the Holy Land and also Egypt. And one of the Zoom sessions is going to be with the great Titus Kennedy, an archaeologist who has written several books. A couple of them are required for the 'Digging up the Bible' course. You definitely want to be a part of 'Digging up the Bible.' It's the first time we're offering this course. It's brand new. And we're also offering basically a course called 'Let's Get Real', which is 'I Don't Have Enough Faith to Be an Atheist' for sixth to eighth graders.

Shanda Fulbright is the main Instructor. I'll also be an instructor with her. That also begins on September 8th. Now, if you're listening to this after September 8th, there's still time to join. You can take the self-paced versions of these courses at any time, but you can still join the premium version with the live Zoom sessions a week or two after. So, go to crossexamined.org, click on online courses. You will see it there. And I hope to see you in those courses. Or better yet, on our trip to Israel. See you then.

Now, I can hear people probably thinking right now, well, yeah, but authority's been abused and that could be true. But you don't judge an ideology by its abuse. You judge it by its proper use. Sure, people can abuse authority, but that's not an argument for never having an authority. Sure, people can abuse their kids, but that's not an argument against good parenting. Right? So, I hear people probably thinking, you know, we've moved in our society away from sort of parental authority to sort of the center of the parenting experience is the child.

Whatever the child wants, whatever the child's feelings are. Well, we all know this, that we're depraved. Kids are depraved. We're depraved. It's easy to be bad. It's hard to be good. How do you reason with a two year old who keeps, you know, hitting his brother with a Wiffle bat? You know, you don't, you don't sit down. How are you feeling? They tried that with the so-called gentle parenting. How has that worked out, Erin?

ERIN:

Yeah, well, I mean everything that you're talking about as far as the distrust of authority and then how that's coming into the relationship with the two year old. So, it's exactly right because it's as if we've thrown out—

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So, sin has affected all of our relationships and all of our views of authority, like you're saying. But what Christians have to do is do the work to see God's good design in establishing authorities and not letting sin taint the whole structure of it. And so, we throw it all out because, well, no, we've experienced bad authorities.

We had a parent who was abusive, and so we're gonna throw it all out. And so, it's, and this is where if you have a strong view of, no, the Bible does seem to be the words of God. It seems like we can really trust that. Then you can do the work to see, oh, it is actually good that first God's the authority, but it's Good that God puts children under their parent's authority. Even though parents aren't going to do it perfectly, the child's not going to do it perfectly either.

And so yeah, the idea of reasoning with a two year old comes from the idea that the two year old's basically good. Actually, a big, huge influencer in parenting right now is a clinical psychologist called Dr. Becky, and her book is called 'Good Inside.' And so, her argument from the very bottom is—

FRANK:

Wait, wait, wait, wait, before you go any further.

ERIN:

You already know what she's arguing because of her title.

FRANK:

No, if kids are good Inside, why do we need to parent them at all?

ERIN:

Yeah, well, here's the thing, Frank. So, you read the book. You listen to the stuff and what the problem is the parent, actually. It's not the child. So, she's arguing this actually really old argument that humans are basically good and what messes up a child is a parent who, who doesn't connect with them. Or listen—

FRANK:

How did the parent go bad if the parent was good as a kid?

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ERIN:

Well, I'm so glad you asked, Frank, because you can simply blame your parents for all of your discourse.

FRANK:

How did they go bad if they were good originally?

ERIN:

Well, here's the problem, right? And so, it just keeps going back and oftentimes it will be framed as your parents did this. And if grace is extended, it's because they believe these ancient ideas that children are supposed to obey, and they go directly, they aim their arrows directly at God's design of, they believe this old idea that children actually need their parents to teach them righteousness as the Scripture describes.

And so, it really is an attack on the whole structure of the family. And of course, a mom, a 25 year old mom scrolling on Instagram isn't gonna see that like, oh, this is actually going after God's original design for how the family is supposed to function in a healthy way, that children need to be told no, or that's wrong to do, using words like right and wrong. When I'm speaking now to audiences of young moms, and I'll say things like, your toddler needs to be used to the word no.

They're like, [gasp] you know, like I've said something terrible. But of course, a toddler needs to be used to the word no because toddlers are exploring the world and they do all kinds of dumb stuff and so they have to learn, no, no, no. You can't do this. You can't do that.

BRETT:

Well, and you say that because you have a view that the child is to obey. That's their obligation to the parent. Parent has this authority and discipline primarily from a biblical worldview is training in righteousness. And I'm not just preparing that kid to obey me. It's ultimately one day to live in submission and in obedience to God, who's the ultimate authority.

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ERIN:

Yeah, which is why, a lot of our work with parents, when we start talking about parenting, we go all the way back to creation and design. So, we go to Genesis 1 and then we go to Genesis 3. And so, we go all the way back to what is our view of human beings? Because if we are basically good, and then as a five year old we do something bad-- Well, I'm good, the little five year old would say. It's my mom who's getting in the way.

And so, we have to go all the way back and start at the beginning of what is the Christian view of the human being? Well, the Christian view is, of course, every human being's made in God's image. And so, as parents, we can't just treat our children however we want to. God gives us standards to that. Jesus is our model of how we treat our children. But the other truth about every human being is that we are rebellious. And we at some point, in some way, are going to shake our fist at God and say, no. I wanna be in charge, and we see that of course at very young ages with kids.

But it's something we battle with our whole lives, right? That we wanna shake our fist and say, no, God, I want to be in charge. And so, if we know these things about human beings, then that informs our parenting. If we think our kids are born 'Good Inside', as Dr. Becky says, well then everything we do based on those beliefs, if it's a wrong diagnosis, which we argue it is, then you're not gonna treat the problem the right way.

FRANK:

Yeah, it makes absolutely no sense to think that way. We all know it's easy to be bad. It's hard to be good. That kids, not just kids, but adults, we're bent towards selfishness.

ERIN:

Yes.

FRANK:

And if the parents are corrupting the good kids, my question's gonna be, how'd the parents go bad if they're inherently good? You know?

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BRETT:

Yeah, well, and with this shift, I mean, again, you go back to the original lie. Did God say? And in the same way a lot of this is mixed with some truths.

FRANK:

Of course.

BRETT:

That then you swallow the lie. So, you're good inside. So, the primary problem is not the sin and rebellion of the child. Instead, now the problem and this is the language of kind of the gentle parenting movement is, well, it's unmet needs. It's the unmet needs of the kid. And so, it shifts.

It kind of subtly shifts who's responsible? Not the kid, but the parent. And then this is how you can blame the parent and undermine the authority of the parent. Because anything that the kid acts out on, you don't correct because there's something sinful or rebellious about the kid. No, instead, it's you as a parent. Well, you've got to meet these certain needs, and you've got to give them opportunities. And one of those big needs is something like empathy or—

Which we would say, these aren't bad things. Of course, if my kids do have unmet, needs, I want to consider that. But that's not the fundamental problem. But you see how when you misdiagnose, then it shifts. And now you have this language, which there's some truth there, but it gets the fundamental issues--

FRANK:

Well, the Bible talks about, if you love people, you'll discipline your children. If you love your children, you'll discipline them. Of course, according to Hebrews 12, God disciplines those he loves. He disciplines us, too. If we're not disciplined, if there's no discipline involved, which is knocking people back on track. That's what it means to be a disciple, right? To get somebody back on track. If we don't do that to our children, they're gonna turn out to be monsters.

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ERIN:

Well, and sadly, I mean, this is what we're seeing. I mean, you could probably-- Anyone listening who's a teacher, and anyone who's listening who's a teacher, who's been a teacher for maybe 20 years or more, has seen a major shift in the classroom.

And college professors, you know, anyone who's working with young people has seen this shift in young people, especially in the Christian realm, where you're trying to get a young person to see that submitting to God is the way to live, to die to yourself, as Jesus calls us to do. Well, dying to yourself when you have been raised to think that yourself is the center of authority, this is a huge hurdle to overcome.

I don't feel like doing this thing, but my teacher's telling me to do it. Well, if you've grown up in a home where you're the authority, you're going to have problems with that teacher because you don't want to do something that she or he is telling you to do. And this is exactly what we're seeing. We're seeing a generation of kids who think they are the authority, and then reality starting to bump into them, and they don't like it. And you partly think, well, of course they don't.

And you don't really blame them if they've been raised in home thinking your feelings is what you base your judgments off of. I mean, it ends up being actually a really terrifying way to live. Because if I'm the authority, and especially my feelings-- I mean, think about the teenage years where your moods swing constantly. Within a day, your feelings can go from up and down.

FRANK:

They change all the time. Yeah.

ERIN:

And so, if that's the measure, if that's what you base decisions off of and all these things, well, you're gonna lead a life that I think is what we're seeing in the culture. You're gonna be depressed. You're not gonna know what to do.

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FRANK:

Well, we're running out of time. We're getting close to our time limit here. And there's so much more we could talk about. That's what you talk about on your podcast, but let's just kind of wrap up our discussion. And for folks that want to go further, you need to listen to Brett and Erin on their podcast, which again is called?

BRETT:

The Maven Parent Podcast.

FRANK:

The Maven Parent Podcast. But let's just go back to the Bible and back to what God has told us on bringing up children. Give us a tip or two for our parents watching. How is it done properly? I, you know, in our culture, you've always got to qualify things because people say, well, corporal punishment, we can't do that.

When, in fact, if it's abused, of course it's abuse. But when it's done properly, it actually helps the child. So, what are some tips that you recommend for small children at this point when it comes to discipline and parenting?

ERIN:

Well, yeah, obviously, a lot to say. I think as parents, from the very beginning, when we correct our kids, when we're teaching our kids, as Deuteronomy 6 talks about just living our lives with our kids and teaching them as we go along, I think we want to root all of our training, and teaching, and righteousness to God, and who he is.

And so, yes, when they're two, it's like mommy said, no, you need to obey mommy. But when they're four and five, when they've clocked their sister because they got angry, eventually you lead the conversation to, we don't treat other people that way because God tells us not to treat people this way. God tells us to love him and to love others. And that means your sister too. And so, we, at an early age, root things like goodness in God and his nature, and evil in things that reject God.

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And so, it's not just, oh, Brett and I are the authority for our kids just because we're mom and dad. I mean, we are given that role for a while, but you know, we have four adult, four of the five are adults. And so, our eventual goal is that they will see God as their authority.

And so, early on we should use language like, we don't do this because it's not right, because it's not good, because it's bad. And even using moral terms like that, which is not, as I say, popular anymore, as Christians, we don't wanna abandon that because we wanna root it in, the reason mom and dad are doing this is because this is what God's told us to do. And so, I think that's a big one.

BRETT:

Yeah, I think we need to recapture the view of the Bible as a source of knowledge. The Bible gives us knowledge of reality. Therefore, what it describes about God, what it describes about his design for family, what it describes about children, and parents, and their relationship, and what it describes about discipline, these are all facts about reality. And compare and contrast everything that the culture says to the truth of scripture. And that'll help us to evaluate things that undermine authority within our families and the culture.

FRANK:

The first lie ever told, has God said? It's repeated over and over again. And it's often the lies that are put out today are covered with great sounding words like equality, and love, and tolerance, and justice, and all of these things when they're really lies, but they're sugar-coated and whitewashed in order to get you to swallow them. So, I think if you just look at what's going on with the whole gentle parenting, we don't discipline our kids. We just talk to them, and we don't in any way contradict their feelings or what they—

That's a disaster. I mean, just from a practical level, it's a disaster. So, thanks for all the work you're doing in that regard. And friends, Lord willing, we're gonna see you here again next week. God bless.

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