

**Palisades Community Bible Church
Online Sunday School**

The Most Dangerous Element In Any Society

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By Brent Briggs

If someone asked you what is the most dangerous element in any society, what would be your answer? Criminals? Drugs? Guns? Viruses? Government corruption? TV?

The answer may shock you, because you MIGHT just have one in your home. The single most dangerous element in any society is: Adolescent Males.

Don't get sidetracked; I'm not one of those who espouse that "toxic masculinity" junk!! What you'll come to understand through this study is that there is NOT ENOUGH masculinity. What's toxic is immaturity!

YIKES! Strong statements! As Ricky Ricardo often said: "You got some 'splainin' to do!" OK, but first, we need establish a foundation.

How about taking your stab at answering the following questions....just to get your mind oriented to what we'll be discussing:

- What is a child? At what age does one cease being a child?
- What is an adolescent? At what ages does one enter this phase, and leave it?
- What is an adult? At what age does one become an adult?

OK, OK, I'm guilty of directing the answers, right? I presumed that AGE defines the phase of one's life. But, isn't that how our society sees it? Don't we assume a child is a child up until their teens, and then an adolescent through their teens, then an adult in their 20s?

Well, if that's what we generally assume, why do we think that one's age defines their stage in life? The answer is primarily due to SCHOOL as the center of our American culture. We usually define a young person's phase of life by what

GRADE they are in school. There are things they should be doing/not doing based on their age and grade level.....right?

That's a part of why we are having this study. Adolescence is a very undefinable phase of life and many factors contribute to the age range in which it occurs.

One's age definitely contributes. One's grade level definitely contributes. But there are greater, more influential factors that determine when a person enters and leaves their adolescent phase.

Just WHY this adolescent phase is so important (and dangerous) will be explained shortly, but let's answer those three questions I posed, first.

- A CHILD is a person who has no responsibility and no freedom. A child does not have to be responsible for anything, and someone else, who IS responsible, directs all their life choices; what to wear, what to eat, when to go to bed, etc. Responsibility and freedoms are given as the child is able to handle them.
- An ADULT is a person who has 100% responsibility and 100% freedom. An adult is responsible for his own welfare and the consequences of his choices, and is often responsible for others. An adult has the freedom to make all of life's choices.
- An ADOLESCENT is a person who has BOTH childlike irresponsibility and adult freedoms. An adolescent may not be held to the same laws as an adult, is often allowed to behave without consequence. He may also have many adult freedoms, such as driving, owning a credit card, holding a job, etc.

Understanding what a child, and what an adult, are is fairly simple. A child is too immature to be held accountable for doing childish things. Wetting the bed, breaking a dish, forgetting to close the refrigerator door, putting a paper clip into an electrical outlet, etc., are things children do because they don't have the maturity to know and act differently. A child is too immature to make his own decisions about bed time, walking around town unsupervised, what to wear, what's for dinner, etc. A child's responsibilities and freedoms are extremely limited.

An adult is totally responsible for himself and, often, for others. If you're a parent, you know! Adults must make decisions for themselves about employment, finances, having children, where to live, relationships, etc. And, whether they get it right, or wrong, adults are totally accountable for the consequences of their decisions and actions. If an adult crashes his car because he drove under the influence, he may also lose his job because he also lost his license. It's nobody's fault but his. If an adult runs a business well and makes very fine income, then buys a nice home, a nice car, a boat, a beach house, etc., it's his reward for being smart and for working hard.

ADOLESCENCE. Now, here's the tough one! An adolescent is in between a child and an adult. He is allowed the absence of responsibility, as if a child. He is allowed freedoms of an adult. An adolescent may make his own decisions about clothing, smoking, drug use, sex, employment, etc., but use his parents' money to fund it all. He may fail a couple of subjects, but the ADULTS in his life might be enablers and not hold him accountable. An adolescent may lose his license, but his mom may drive him around...so, no big deal. An adolescent may sign a multi-million dollar pro ball contract, and blow it all away on parties and mansions.

1 Corinthians 14:20 Brothers, do not be children in your thinking. Be infants in evil, but in your thinking be mature.

On the other hand, an adolescent may exhibit responsibility and maturity very early in life, yet still not be able to do all the adult things he wants to do: get a real job, take out a business loan, get a concealed carry permit, vote, etc.

I'll offer myself as an example...hopefully, without seeming like I'm boasting. I have worked steadily since I was 8 years old. I mowed lawns, cleaned out garages, washed cars, etc., as a kid and I always had money of my own. As I got older, I worked on farms and banked my money. When I was 14, I bought my first motorcycle; paid cash for it new. I had to wait until I was 15 yrs old to get a license for it in TX. Once I could drive it on the road, I was able to get a better job and banked my money. When I was 15, I bought my first car with cash and paid for my own insurance, etc. By 16, I got my license to drive it. I'd had my license about a week when my stepfather informed me that he was 'cutting me off.' He said I could eat one meal a day and sleep in 'his house' until I turned 18. Otherwise, I would be responsible for clothing, my vehicles, and other meals, etc.

Honestly, I thought I'd graduated! I thought it was his way of telling me I was on my way to becoming a MAN! I felt very proud.

On the other hand, I did not have any male friends my age. They were goofy, stupid, immature, and I just did not have the time to waste on their idiocy. I had no interest in pranks, hanging out, drinking or pot. I worked in a gas station and learned to work on cars, deal with customers, and made friends with some police officers. On weekend nights, the football players would pull in driving their dads' cars – with a cheerleader in the front seat – and say; “Fill it up, BOY.” They'd give me their dad's credit card and I'd serve them graciously.

A couple of years later, after I'd graduated from Navy SEAL training, I visited home. I noticed a number of those same fellows were squirting ketchup on burgers or bussing tables in restaurants.

“Adolescence is society's permission slip for combining physical maturity with psychological irresponsibility.” Terri Apter

Let me offer a negative view of adolescence. For example, an adult age son who “just needs more time” to get going. No matter how much they fail, their parents are always there to baby them along, enable them, and see that they never experience the negative consequences of their decisions and actions. **It's almost like they are pets.**

“Drug abuse in America has skyrocketed, and drug overdoses have claimed more American lives LAST YEAR than were lost in the entire Vietnam War. Despite the daily horror stories in the news and multiple governmental initiatives aimed at curbing this epidemic, drug addiction still seems to be on its deadly rise.” Geeta Brown, President of InterCoast Colleges.

Author Anne Murphy Paul, wrote “The New Science of Smart” and “Paying For The Party”; research-based books focused on contemporary trends in colleges and universities. Here are some of her most salient points:

- Too many kids of parents who pay for college return their families' largesse by achieving lower grades
- College students enjoying a four-year paid vacation courtesy of their parents are merely a symptom of a larger problem

- Across the board, American colleges and universities are not doing a very good job of preparing their students for the workplace or their postgraduation lives
- The priorities of many undergrads are with extracurricular clubs and activities, fraternities and sororities, practicing and playing sports, and partying and socializing — and let's not forget sleeping.
- Not only does athletic spending per athlete far exceed academic spending per student, it is also growing about twice as fast," the report noted, with much of the spending going to multimillion-dollar coaching contracts, more athletic staff and better facilities.
- college administrations are overly concerned with the social and athletic activities of their students. In 'Paying for the Party,' she explains the "party pathway," which eases many students through college, helped along by a powerful Greek system, residence halls that funnel students into the party scene and a host of easier majors.
- As recent graduates can attest, the job market isn't kind to candidates who can't demonstrate genuine competence, along with a well-honed willingness to work hard. Nor is the global economy forgiving of an American workforce with increasingly weak literacy, math and science abilities.

"Adolescence is a modern construct and very American in so many ways." Tayari Jones

Ephesians 4: 11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. 14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

In almost every society we Americans would consider as “third world, or stone age, or primitive,” adolescence is NOT allowed. Study any ‘primitive’ society and you’ll find that there were/are elaborate rituals around the steps a boy must take in order to become a man. In most, the boy is considered a child right up until he goes through such rituals as to prove his manhood.

Rites of passage from childhood to manhood are considered by these social groups to be important and valuable to the individual as well as the entire community. The child spends a great deal of time being ‘coached’ toward accomplishing his rite of passage and his successful transition into manhood is celebrated. It is a great occasion!

Some of these rites of passage include accumulating enough resources to support a wife; cattle, house, etc. Some include physical challenges; climbing a mountain, spending extended time alone in the wilderness, demonstrating hunting or fishing prowess, etc. One tribe makes mittens with soldier ants sewn inside. The child must put them on and wear them for a period of time, enduring the incredible pain without showing it – and this may be repeated many times.

In short, primitive cultures who know the dangers of a child NOT making a defined transition into manhood just do not tolerate it. Why? Because, the foundation of any society is the family. The stronger the family, the stronger the society. Why do you think the first institution God made was that of marriage?

Genesis 2:24 For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and shall be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.

On the other hand, the more “civilized” the society, the less focus there is on the preparation for adulthood, and the adolescent phase can extend over many years. In a study done in the late 1990s, the average...**AVERAGE...age range of American adolescence was from age 10 to age 39**, and expanding! Adolescent behaviors included such activities as having sex, smoking, alcohol and drug use, using a credit card, etc. (I’ve been unable to find current statistics.....)

What this study was showing is that children are delving into “adult activities” earlier and earlier in years. With the advent of the internet, smart phones, etc., kids have access to material their parents don’t even know exist. But, by gosh, every kid has a smart phone!

On the other end of the spectrum, men in their 20s, 30s and 40s are unable to hold jobs, live independently from some external support system (parents, prison, etc.). Biological adults are increasingly socially stunted with poor judgement, poor work ethics, poor social skills and educations that did not prepare them for life.

I have several friends in this area who run businesses. Like me, they are severely limited by their inability to find decent workers. We'd gladly pay well a young man who knows how to put his pants on frontward (and keep them up all day!), who can show up reasonably on time, leave their phone in their car, tolerate some training, give a good day's work, and not steal us blind. If you want to know why it takes a week to get your car back from the mechanic, it's probably because the boss is under it doing the work himself!

What makes the adolescent male so dangerous to a society is the physical maturity combined with social immaturity. In a previous study, I shared how NFL coaches have learned that their players are, in general, grown men with little girls' emotions. They must treat these behemoths like little children, emotionally, while they possess the size and strength to derail a train.

“The most dangerous creation of any society is the man who has nothing to lose.” James Baldwin

Hebrews 5:12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child.

In primitive societies, games and sports are truly treated as pastimes for enjoyment's sake. Otherwise, parents work closely with their kids to teach them how to mature and succeed in life.

In more civilized societies, sports consume huge portions of the time and energies of young people. I've gotten myself into a number of verbal battles with friends when I've asked them; “How might it affect our nation if fathers taught, coached and practiced their sons in how to start a business, to provide a living for a family, to make good choices, etc. in the way they encourage sports?” Most dads will defend those evening soccer practices to the death!

I was involved in opening a cabinet manufacturing plant in Lionville, PA back in the 80s. I got to know an Amish fellow and discussed the possibility of hiring some of their young men. He told me that Amish boys go to school up to 9th grade. Then, they attend only one day per week. The other four days are spent in learning the skills of his father. He said cabinet making, especially with modern machinery, would be very attractive to a lot of them.

Romans 5:3-4 More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope,

James 1: 2 My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; 3 Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. 4 But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. 5 If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. 6 But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.

51% of adult males in the US are not in a committed relationship. 70% of men who are “living with someone” are still looking for the ‘right one.’ 40% of voting age Americans favor a more ‘utopian form of government.’ There is a condition that is growing rapidly in the US called “Peter Pan Syndrome.” It’s the desire to never grow up – to remain a child always.

Combine these characteristics in a person who graduates from the right kind of university, has the right kind of social connections, and lands in an influential position, and you have the makings of disaster.

**“The Kennedys were skillful politicians but, in reality, they were just little boys.”
Marylin Monroe**

Here’s the point. A boy in a man’s body, with full adult freedoms, is the number one factor in crimes, incarcerated populations, domestic abuse, substance abuse, broken homes, unintended pregnancies, etc. Males who don’t make a defined transition into manhood DON’T. They don’t make good husbands, or fathers, or leaders.

The Harvard Business Review published a study on ‘why smart people cannot learn.’ It studied the levels in organizations their leaders reach at which they are able to shift all the consequences of bad decision making onto others. **“We learn from our mistakes. But, if you don’t experience the negatives associated with mistakes, there is no learning.”** It looked at how executives would lay the blame for their own inadequacies on others and punish, or fire them, as their way of dealing with the problems. It was a scary article to read!

“Make no mistake, adolescence is a war. No one gets out unscathed.” Harlan Coben

OK, I’m sure someone is asking; “What about girls?” Females are NOT immune from the same poor influences that can turn them into lifelong adolescents. However, biologically, MOST women do not escape the number one change in life that separates girls from women: babies. Once her baby is laid in her arms, a girl turns into a woman very fast. Yes, there are those who never grow up, who exhibit poor judgement, who make terrible mothers....but, for the most part, the instincts of a woman emerge.

With guys, it is not as much biological. **Maturity must be trained into them.** One final illustration, and we’ll close.

An 18 yr old man was standing on the gallows about to be hanged for robbing a bank, and murder. As the rope was slipped over his head, he asked if his mother could come up and kiss him goodbye. The crowd “awwwwwwed” in unison. As the woman made her way to the top of the platform, she burst into tears and embraced him.

Suddenly, the son bit off his mother’s ear and, as she shrieked and fell back, the crowd screamed “Hang the monster!” The condemned yelled to the crowd; “You call ME a monster? That woman is the monster! She never spanked me, never corrected me, and told me everything I did was wonderful. No matter what I did wrong, she kissed me and called me a good boy! SHE is your monster!”

**Jesus, you promised to send us your Holy Spirit to comfort and guide.
Please, lead us toward spiritual maturity.
Help us strengthen the faith of our families and friends.....and, enemies.**

Let us not become comfortable in our pews...in our houses...in our nice little lives. May we always tell the truth of the Living God!

Amen