

3 Steps for OJ Simpson to Set Himself Free

Editor's note: Years ago, O.J. Simpson was paid \$600,000 to lend his name to a book titled If I Did It. Public outcry canceled its release. Only God and O.J. know the answer to the decades-old question. This commentary attempts to provide some biblical perspective on the day of his parole hearing.

O.J. Simpson, 70-year-old NFL Hall of Famer and Heisman Trophy winner, charismatic movie star and product pitchman, sports commentator and suspected killer of former wife, Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman, may be paroled this week. Acquitted of the murder charges, he's up for parole regarding numerous felony convictions nine years ago.

"The Juice" regularly appears on "Most Hated Personalities in America" lists. He sits in the Pantheon along with the likes of Casey Anthony, Bernie Madoff and other unsavory characters.

One CNN/Gallup poll revealed 78 percent of Americans believed murder charges brought against O.J. were either "definitely true" or "probably true." Attorney Michael Shapiro stated, "The judge believed he got away with murder!" Kato Kaelin, his friend, stated emphatically, "In my opinion, yes, I think he's guilty!"

Reviewing the grizzly photographs of the slaughtered double murder victims sends chills down the spine. Yet, O.J. was found not guilty.

"The glove didn't fit" so the jury "had to acquit" according to attorney Johnny Cochran. O.J.'s "Dream Team" said police framed him by planting evidence as they cited "racism" in the trial.

Scripture tells us, "A man burdened with bloodshed of any

person will flee until death; let no man help him" (Prov. 28:17). Mr. Simpson was found "not guilty," so should we help him?

He will have the opportunity to address the board in his nationally televised hearing, so my prayer is that he'll communicate something like the following.

Three Exhortations for O.J.

If I were able to talk with O.J. prior to the hearing, I'd reflect on God's amazing grace and how I've experienced His mercy when I deserved His righteous judgment. I'd ask God to protect me from any self-righteousness or vindictiveness.

The sacrificial, substitutionary death of Jesus purchased my forgiveness and placed me in His eternal family. I'd make sure O.J. understood this and would invite him to respond to God's initiative in obedience to Jesus as his Lord and Savior. "So likewise, any of you who does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple" (Luke 14:33).

I'd tell him the story of John Newton, the profane slave trader who participated in slaves' deaths, yet found redemption in Christ, penning his journey in the classic hymn, "Amazing Grace."

Once he grasped the implications of biblical conversion, I'd convey three scriptural admonitions.

1. Tell the Truth

Revelation 21:8 warns us that "murderers" and "all liars shall have their portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone." Jesus tells us that "speaking the truth in love, we may grow up ..." (Eph. 4:15).

I'd tell him to come clean regarding what really happened that infamous night. Tell the parole board and the entire world if he took Nicole's and Ron's lives. The Bible associates Moses,

David and Paul with murder, yet all were transformed by the grace of God into men whose lives glorified God.

O.J. can never be tried again for the crime. If he did it, our legal system's "double jeopardy" provision protects him from ever being prosecuted again.

Then he could prosper in peace with a clear conscience as a truly free man—free from perpetual guilt and tormenting nightmares brought on by hidden sin and hypocrisy.

"He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy" (Prov. 28:13).

2. Ask Forgiveness

Their families were completely devastated when Nicole and Ron were slaughtered. The anguish on the family's faces when the verdict was given was gut-wrenching.

After the acquittal, imagine the pain loved ones experienced as they watched O.J. laughing and posing; later, he pretended to stab a reporter with a banana; finally, he hosted a prank show called *Juiced* where he engaged in "viewer discretion" skits.

When we've offended others, God commands us to humble ourselves, ask forgiveness and pursue reconciliation. We may need individuals to serve as a buffer amidst hostile emotions, but genuine disciples of Jesus obey His commands.

"Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go on your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" (Matt.5:23-24).

I'd challenge O.J., who "started a Baptist Church in prison" (*USA Today* 7/18/17). It might be a greater challenge than plowing through a line of behemoth NFL players, but it must be

done, especially with those who hate us.

Nelson Mandela was in prison for 27 years. When he was released he said, "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

The Goldman and the Brown families deserve the opportunity to hear a sincere appeal for forgiveness, extend mercy and then try to close a chapter on this unspeakably traumatic season of their lives.

3. Settle Your Debts

During the infamous Bronco chase on the LA freeway before O.J. was arrested, retired police detective Tom Lang begged a despondent O.J. not to kill himself. Simpson groaned, "I can't take this"... I'm the only one who deserves to get hurt ... I wanna' say goodbye to my kids ... I wanna' be with Nicole."

From his recorded comments that night, it was obvious O.J. wanted to settle accounts and get things in order.

Scripture tells us, "Owe no one anything, except to love one another" ().

To prove rehabilitation, settle outstanding debts and gain a fresh start, O.J. must address the financial settlement he owes the Goldman and Brown families.

After O.J.'s acquittal in the criminal trial, the families sued him in civil court. A 12-person jury unanimously found him liable for the murders and ordered him to pay \$33.5 million.

Simpson concealed his assets and "claimed to be broke." The parole board needs to inquire if O.J. will take responsibility to settle this debt.

Ron Goldman's sister, Kim said, "We were thrilled that 12

people unanimously determined he was the killer of Ron and Nicole. We've collected less than one percent."

A Tsunami of Attention

Case analyst Laurie Levinson, said of the long-anticipated parole board hearing, "If O.J. is released, there will be a tsunami of attention!"

May we all be in prayer for the commissioners to act justly and for God to grant the gift of repentance to James Orenthal Simpson to follow the ways of the Lord. Let's trust in God's justice, the wheels of which move slowly but surely.

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to God's wrath, for it is written: 'Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,' says the Lord'" (). {eo}